

COVERING THE BEST IN HORROR, SCI-FI & FANTASY ENTERTAINMENT

SHADOWLAND MAGAZINE

#3

\$6.95

**BATMAN
RETURNS**

**KILLER BAT
FILMS**

**GYAOS
BAT KAIJU**

**THE BAT
WHISPERS**

BAT-MANIA ISSUE!



DREADITORIAL

Happy New Year! It's a little hard to believe that we're already in 2012; the way time flies can drive even the sanest person crazy...or dare we say, "batty?" And thus we have the theme of our first issue of the new year: bats. It's no surprise that these winged night-fliers are so often featured in the horror, sci-fi & fantasy genres – in fact, few mammals have shared in such a prestigious honor. As creatures of the night, bats fit a mysterious, supernatural archetype, one readily employed by literature centuries ago. Take for example, *Varney the Vampire*: written in the 1840s, *Varney* was one of the first novels to originate many of the modern vampire tropes. A bat-like vampire not only appears as an illustration in the novel, but on the cover to the original printing. Around fifty years later Bram Stoker's *Dracula* took the bat motif further by having the title character transform into a bloodsucking variation of the flying critter.

By 1920 the sinister connotations surrounding bats continued on Broadway with *The Bat*, a murder-mystery play that spawned a silent-film adaptation and two sound remakes. Though this was a 'bat' of the human variety – an epithet for a masked killer – even so, Hollywood never had any qualms about including the genuine article as well. Filmmakers seemed to have a special place for killer bats, evidenced in *The Devil Bat* (1940), *Chosen Survivors* (1974), *The Roost* (2005), and countless more of their ilk.

Now, let's not think that these nocturnal creatures are exclusive to the domain of horror. Science fiction has seen ample usage of bats too. *It Conquered The World* (1956) gave moviegoers the first (and only?) example of mind controlling space bats. 1974's *The Bat People* took things to the next level by featuring a full-grown man-bat, and even Japan offered us the *largest* bat of them all – the people eating kaiju Gyaos, who first confronted everyone's favorite fire-breathing turtle in *Gamera vs. Gyaos* (1967).

And, finally, one of the most popular bat-themed icons of all time fits squarely in the fantasy realm – the Dark Knight himself, Batman.

Needless to say, we may have a few bats in our belfry, but we're sure that this issue of *Shadowland* will be a fang-tastic read! Get ready as we examine Batman's origins, honor the 20th anniversary of *Batman Returns*, take a glimpse at killer bat flicks, and quiet things down with a retrospective on *The Bat Whispers*. Enjoy!



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NEXT ISSUE: *Shadowland Magazine* has the power! We'll have a review on the current *Masters of the Universe* toyline, a retrospective on the 1987 live-action MOTU film starring Dolph Lundgren & Frank Langella, and many more surprises!

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Cover: The very talented Dwayne Pinkney has done it again – presenting us with an eye-popping, jaw-dropping take on the Caped Crusader! See more of Dwayne's artwork at www.ShadowlandMagazine.com. He is also available for commissions at DPinkneyArt@hotmail.com

Back Cover: Mr. Pinkney is pulling double duty this time around, sharing his fantastic customization of the classic Aurora Batman model kit!

Contributors: Andrew M. Boylan, Gregory Bray, Flynn Cook, Amanda Dyar, Kirk Kimball, Matt Richards, Kevin "Dead Kev" Sproles, Anthony Tollin, and Frank Warden. *Special thanks* to Steve Englehart and Dwayne Pinkney!

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NEWS BITES

REVIVING THE EVIL DEAD

Director Fede Alvarez has started filming the remake to Sam Raimi's *The Evil Dead*. If Alvarez's name sounds unfamiliar, there's a good reason for it: *The Evil Dead* is his feature debut (his only other directorial work is *Panic Attack*, a 4 minute sci-fi short). Cast as the lead is Jane Levy (*Shameless*, *Suburgatory*), filling in for the role that made Bruce Campbell a cult-film star. Diablo Cody, screenwriter of *Juno* and *Jennifer's Body*, penned the script which she has stated is "grounded in reality" and "unbelievably violent." *The Evil Dead* is set for an April 2013 release.

Frighten Brighton

HORROR COMES TO BRIGHTON

Horror film fans in the UK who either live in or nearby Brighton owe it to themselves to check out *Frighten Brighton*, an impressive series of horror events and screenings. As if seeing double-to-triple billings of some classic horror films weren't enough, *Frighten Brighton* also features a Macabre Market where fans can purchase all kinds of merchandise and collectibles. There's also book signings, special guests, horror quizzes, and free horror giveaways! Some of the films screened thus far have been *The Gore Gore Girls* (1972), *Frankenstein & The Monster from Hell* (1974), *The Entity* (1981), *Re-Animator* (1985), and *Night of the Living Dead* (1990).

Frighten Brighton is organized by Cyberschizoid (Rick Gladman) and Scare Sarah (Sarah James), the team behind the successful *Classic Horror Campaign* film screenings in the UK.

Visit <http://frightenbrighton.wordpress.com> for more information on *Frighten Brighton*.

RETURN OF THE KING

The King of the Monsters has been dormant for the last few years, having previously appeared in *Godzilla Final Wars* back in 2004 (released theatrically in his native Japan, but only received a straight-to-DVD release in the United States). But now, the Big G is stomping back into action with a series of highly-detailed S.H. MonsterArts action figures. Godzilla and MechaGodzilla have been the first to be released, both resembling their appearance from 1994's *Godzilla vs. MechaGodzilla*. Standing at around 6", these figures feature unprecedented levels of detail, a number of accessories, and nearly 29 points of articulation!

The S.H. MonsterArts MechaGodzilla.



The figures have starred in a series of commercials featuring special effects supervision by Koichi Kawakita, SFX director of the Heisei *Godzilla* films (1989-1995). The commercials can be viewed on S.H. MonsterArt's official website at <http://tamashii.jp/special/shma/index.html> – where you can also catch a glimpse of their upcoming SpaceGodzilla figure, set to be released spring 2012.

BIGFOOT FOUND!

Searching for the illusive Bigfoot may be a daunting task, but fans of the big hairy guy's cinematic exploits will now be able to get their hands on a complete guide to his films – a formidable sub-genre in its own right. David Coleman, author of *The Bigfoot Filmography: Fictional and Documentary Appearances in Film and Television*, has written the most exhaustive resource on what he has appropriately titled "Cine du Sasquatch." Coleman's book not only covers every Bigfoot, Sasquatch, and Yeti appearance in film and television, but it's also filled with countless reproductions of rare photos, posters, lobby cards, behind-the-scenes stills, and interviews. Also, be sure to check out David Coleman's fantastic *Bob Mitchum Meets Bigfoot* article in *Shadowland Magazine* #2, if you haven't already!



CAMELOT NO MORE

It looks like the Lady of the Lake won't be rising anytime soon. The long rumored remake of John Boorman's 1981 Arthurian epic *Excalibur* has been shelved. Bryan Singer, director of the first two *X-Men* films and *Superman Returns*, has been trying to get a retelling of the story off the ground for the last few years. According to Singer, the remake was derailed due to Warner Brothers' decision to push production forward on a similar King Arthur film.



AVENGERS AND MUTANTS GO TO WAR!

Marvel Comics is pulling out all the stops to promote their upcoming *Avengers vs. X-Men* 12-issue mini-series. Comic book stores are being encouraged to participate in 'launch parties' that will give readers the chance to be the first in line to purchase *Avengers vs. X-Men* #1, along with picking up some exclusive items including lithographs, postcards, mini posters, and allegiance pins. An assortment of limited edition variant covers have been announced for each issue and Marvel's Senior Vice-President of Sales, David Gabriel, has made it clear that they are aiming to make sure *Avengers vs. X-Men* becomes the best-selling comic title of the year. The first issue will be available early April, leaving just one question...whose side will you be on? Avengers or X-Men?

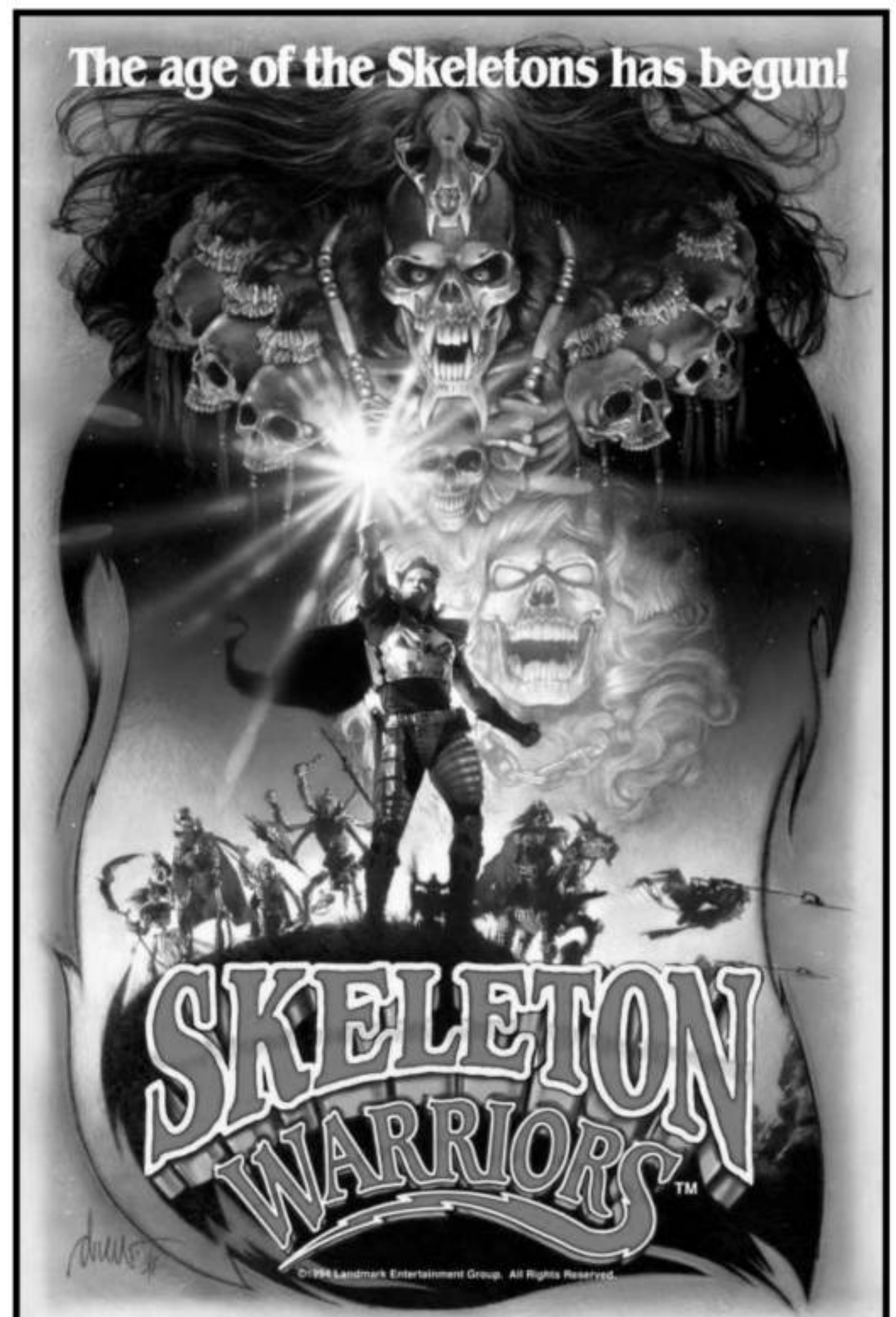
THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK...ON TELEVISION

Talk of a live-action *Star Wars* television show

first made the rounds soon after *Episode III* hit theaters. Very little details have since leaked out about the potential series aside from a few meager rumors and hearsay. What is known for certain is the timeframe of the show, taking place between the prequels and the original trilogy. The series will adopt a darker tone than the prequels and focus on the criminals, gangs, and seedy underbelly of the Republic, which has fallen to the Empire. The latest word comes directly from producer Rick McCallum, who revealed the show's current working title: *Star Wars: Underworld*. McCallum not only divulged that Lucasfilm is sitting on 50 scripted episodes (the equivalent to 3 seasons) but that each episode would cost around \$5 million to produce.

BAD TO THE BONE

For the first time, fans of the 1993 animated series *Skeleton Warriors* can finally own all thirteen episodes on DVD. Special features include a producer commentary on two episodes, a behind-the-scenes documentary and a photo gallery. *Skeleton Warriors* tells the story of Prince Lightstar and the Legion of Light's battle to save Planet Luminaire from the evil forces of Baron Dark and his army of living skeletons. They sure don't make Saturday morning cartoons like that anymore!



BATMAN



BATMAN, THE WORLD-FAMOUS DARK KNIGHT, was created by a garment worker named Robert Kahn and a shoe salesman named Bill Finger.

The dynamic duo met at a party when Kahn was 19, and Finger was 21. At the time, Kahn was working in the garment industry, and Finger was a shoe salesman. The boys quickly discovered they shared a common fascination with comics. They decided to quit their jobs and try their luck as cartoonists.

Kahn's bedroom in his family apartment on the Grand Concourse became a makeshift studio, and Finger and Kahn began collaborating. Finger did the writing and Kahn did the drawing, but to conceal his Jewish "secret identity" — just as Stanley Lieber had become Stan Lee and Jacob Kurtzberg had become Jack Kirby — Robert Kahn also assumed a new name of his own creation: BOB KANE. Finger stuck with his real name.

Kane eventually began working for Will Eisner, whom he had known in high school, drawing mostly crude, cartoonish humor strips. Still employing Bill Finger as his anonymous writing partner, Kane sold DC a character named Clip Carson, a knock-off of Alex Raymond's "Jungle Jim."

While doing "Clip Carson" for Action Comics, Kane developed a relationship with Action's editor, Vince Sullivan. DC had recently struck gold with Superman, and Sullivan was frantically hunting for new "mystery men" (aka superheroes) to add to the stable.

One Friday afternoon in 1939, Bob Kane asked Sullivan how much money Siegel and Shuster got for doing Superman. Kane was shocked when the editor reportedly told him the two depression-era teenagers made about \$800 a week. Sullivan also told a stunned Kane that he was looking for a NEW superhero to headline another title he edited, Detective Comics. With stars in his eyes, Kane boasted HE would create that new hero, over the weekend!

Kane got to work. The Man of Steel had cornered the market on blue tights and black hair, so Kane decided to give his new hero red tights and blonde hair, plus a Phantom-style domino mask.

Mimicking the Hawkman characters seen in Alex Raymond's Flash Gordon, he added a pair of mechanical wings, and called his creation... **BIRD-MAN!**

But Finger wasn't terribly impressed with Kane's concept. He didn't think a hero named "Bird-Man" would be accepted as a lead feature for a book titled Detective Comics. Finger suggested they instead pattern the new character after pulp heroes such as The Shadow.

Then, as recorded in The Steranko History of Comics, Finger recalls, "I got Webster's Dictionary off the shelf and was hoping they had a drawing of a BAT, and sure enough it did. I said, 'Notice the ears! Why don't we duplicate the ears?' I suggested [Bob] draw what looked

SECRET ORIGINS OF THE BATMAN

THE REAL, TRUE STORY OF WHO THE BAT-MAN IS, AND HOW HE CAME TO BE

by **KIRK KIMBALL**

aka **ROBBY REED OF DIALBFORBLOG.COM**



DEBUT: THIS MAY 1939 AD SHOWS THE FIRST IMAGE OF BATMAN TO EVER APPEAR IN PRINT.



ABOVE:
DETECTIVE COMICS 27, MAY 1939, FEATURING THE FIRST APPEARANCE OF BATMAN.



ABOVE:
KANE LIFTED BATMAN'S COVER POSE FROM THIS FLASH GORDON PANEL DRAWN BY ALEX RAYMOND, A SWIPE DISCOVERED BY ARLEN SCHUMER.

like a cowl. I had suggested he bring the nosepiece down and make him mysterious and not show any eyes at all. I didn't like the wings, so I suggested he make a cape and scallop the edges so it would flow out behind him when he ran and would look like bat wings. He didn't have any gloves on. We gave him gloves." Then Kane did a cover sketch, swiping Batman's pose from an Alex Raymond Flash Gordon panel (pictured left).

The weekend over, Kane showed up at DC on Monday and submitted his work to Vin Sullivan. The editor loved it, and commissioned Kane to come up with a six-page story for Detective Comics #27 (pictured left) starring the mysterious new character, who was to be called "The Batman."

PARTNERS OF PERIL

Kane quickly negotiated a contract to deliver a set number of "Bat-Man" stories per year, all crediting Kane as sole creator. He never mentioned Finger's role to Sullivan.

Kane's family was well-connected. His uncle owned a garment factory, and his father was a printer at the New York Daily News, so the young novice was guided by expert business advice from seasoned professionals.

According to comic writer Cat Yronwode, "Kane himself once told me that his very first contract with DC was different than Siegel and Shuster's Superman contract because Kane's father, who worked in the newspaper business, knew that comic strip creators and newspaper columnists made lots of money. Because Bob was not of legal age, he negotiated on Bob's behalf and got some kind of ancillary rights clause written that promised Bob extra money or points in case Batman was used in other formats (movies, strips, books, toys)."

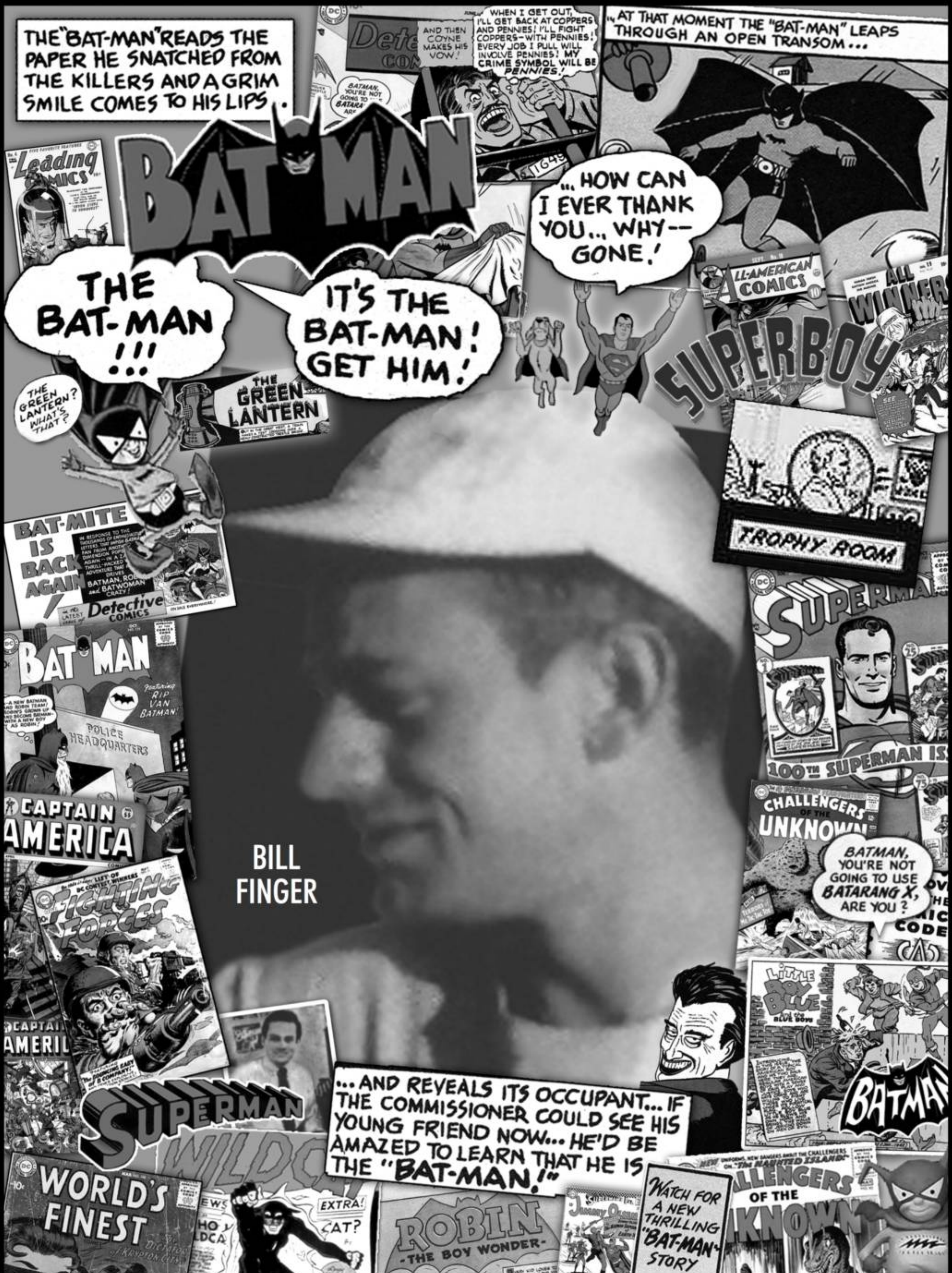
"Kane told me," Cat continues, "That the reason he made out so well and Siegel and Shuster did not was that HIS dad looked out for him, and their folks did not — and that the early contract his dad negotiated formed the basis for the renegotiated contracts of later years."

When Kane told Bill Finger the big news that DC had bought the Batman character, Kane somehow neglected to mention that the contract he had signed specified that he was to be credited as its sole creator. Accordingly, the first-ever Batman story is credited to Rob't Kane, despite the fact that it was written by Bill Finger. Or perhaps I should say... *adapted* by Bill Finger.

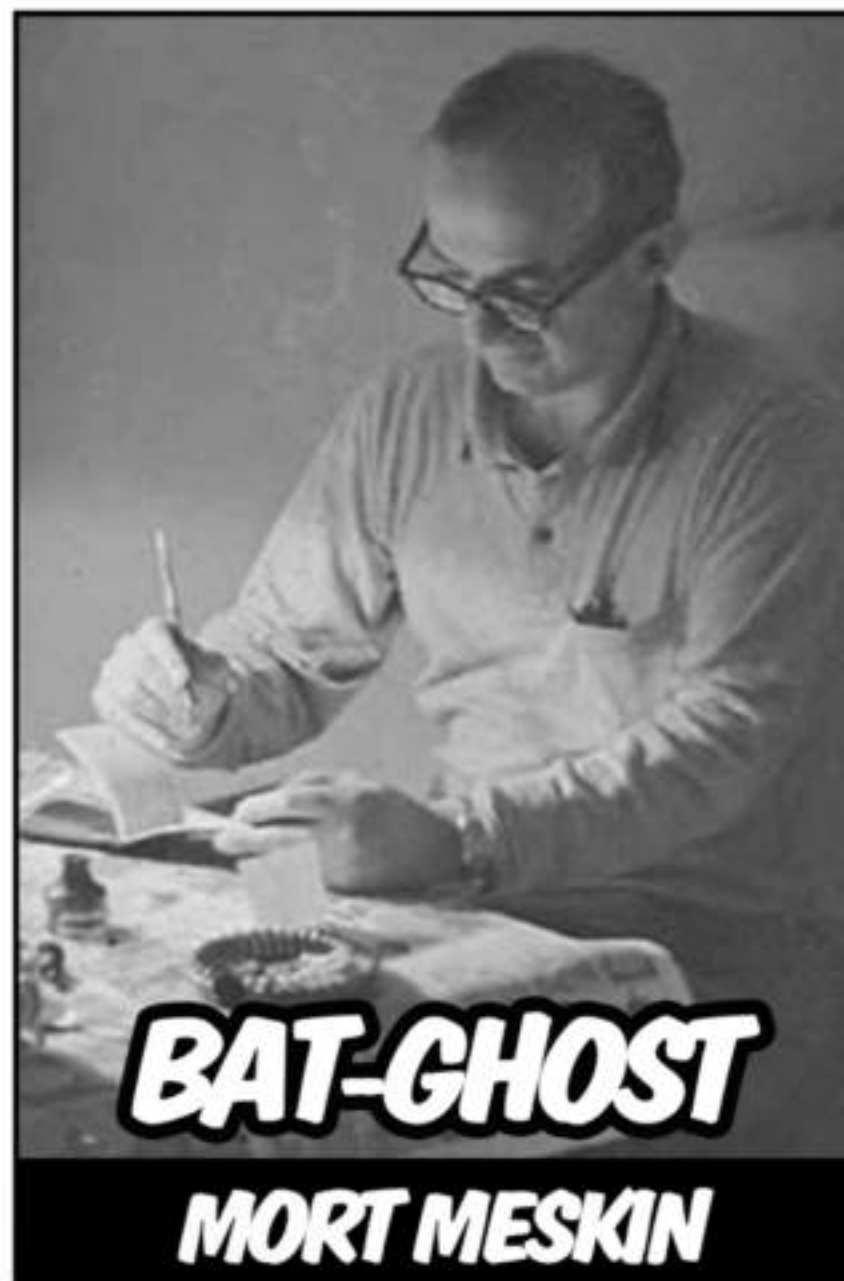
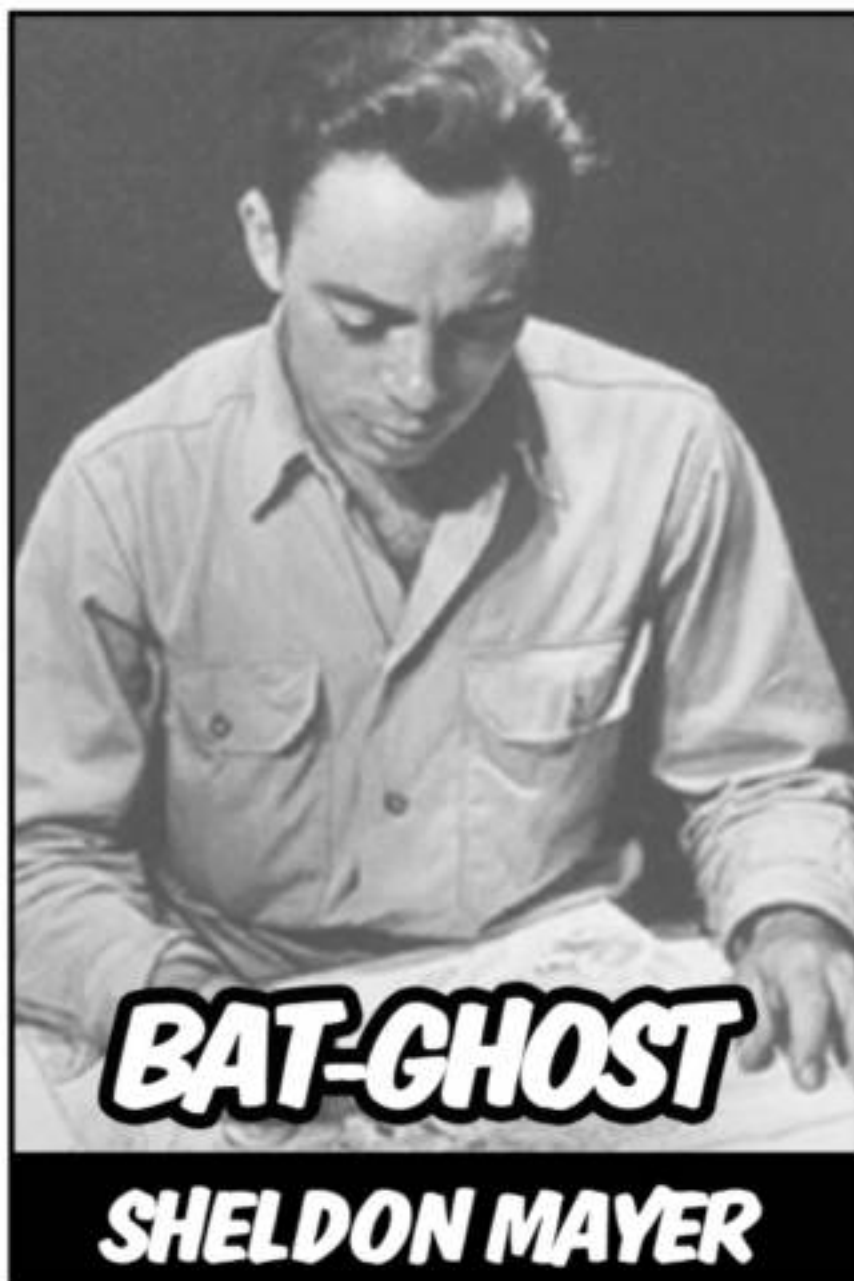
In The Steranko History of Comics, Finger admits, "My first [Batman] script was a take-off on a Shadow story." Shadow creator Walter Gibson once said Batman was "a clowned-up version of the Shadow." But no one knew exactly how much of a "take-off" on the Shadow Batman was, and no one knew which Shadow pulp Finger had used as the basis for Batman's debut story, "The Case of the Chemical Syndicate."

These burning questions remained unanswered for nearly seven decades, until 2007, when Shadow uberfans Anthony Tollin and Will Murray finally identified the story as "PARTNERS OF PERIL," which ran in the November 1, 1936 issue of The Shadow pulp magazine.

In The Steranko History of Comics, Finger revealed more sources. "Bruce Wayne's first name came from Robert BRUCE,



BILL
FINGER



the Scottish patriot. Wayne, being a playboy, was a man of gentry. I searched for a name that would suggest colonialism. I tried Adams, Hancock, then I thought of Mad Anthony WAYNE.”

After DC found out Finger was ghost-writing the Batman series for Kane, they hired him directly. As Batman artist JERRY ROBINSON recalls, “Bill and I began to get offers from other publishers. Everybody wanted to have somebody who was associated with the success of Batman.”

“DC finally learned about our existence and that we were going elsewhere, they immediately called us down and signed us up. We worked, after that, directly for DC and not for Bob.”

BILL FINGER ON THE COUCH

Why was the successful, sought-after Bill Finger hired by DC at a modest page rate only? Doom Patrol creator Arnold Drake, who was very close to Bill Finger, once recalled, “Bill had a severe lack of self-esteem and the company exploited it. There was definitely a guilt there. They felt guilty toward his situation, but that didn’t stop them from feeding his addiction for advanced checks. This left him in their complete power.”

“Bill was a craftsman,” Jerry Robinson adds. “He couldn’t let anything go unless it met his sense of perfection. He really worked on his scripts, and he wasn’t a fluent writer. Some writers write very easily and produce a lot. Others, some of our greatest writers, sweat out every word. Bill was in the latter category.”

“He really worked on his scripts and it didn’t come easily. He tried to do a creative job each time. They didn’t appreciate it ... they would treat him like dirt because he

was a day late regardless of how good the material was that he was writing. This only further demoralized him.”

But despite his difficulties, Bill Finger persevered, leaving his “prints” all OVER the comic book industry. He earned several official bylines, including one as co-creator of the original Green Lantern, another for co-creating Wildcat. Finger also wrote a few episodes of the Batman TV show, “The Clock King’s Crazy Crimes” and “The Clock King Gets Crowned,” which aired October 12-13, 1966.

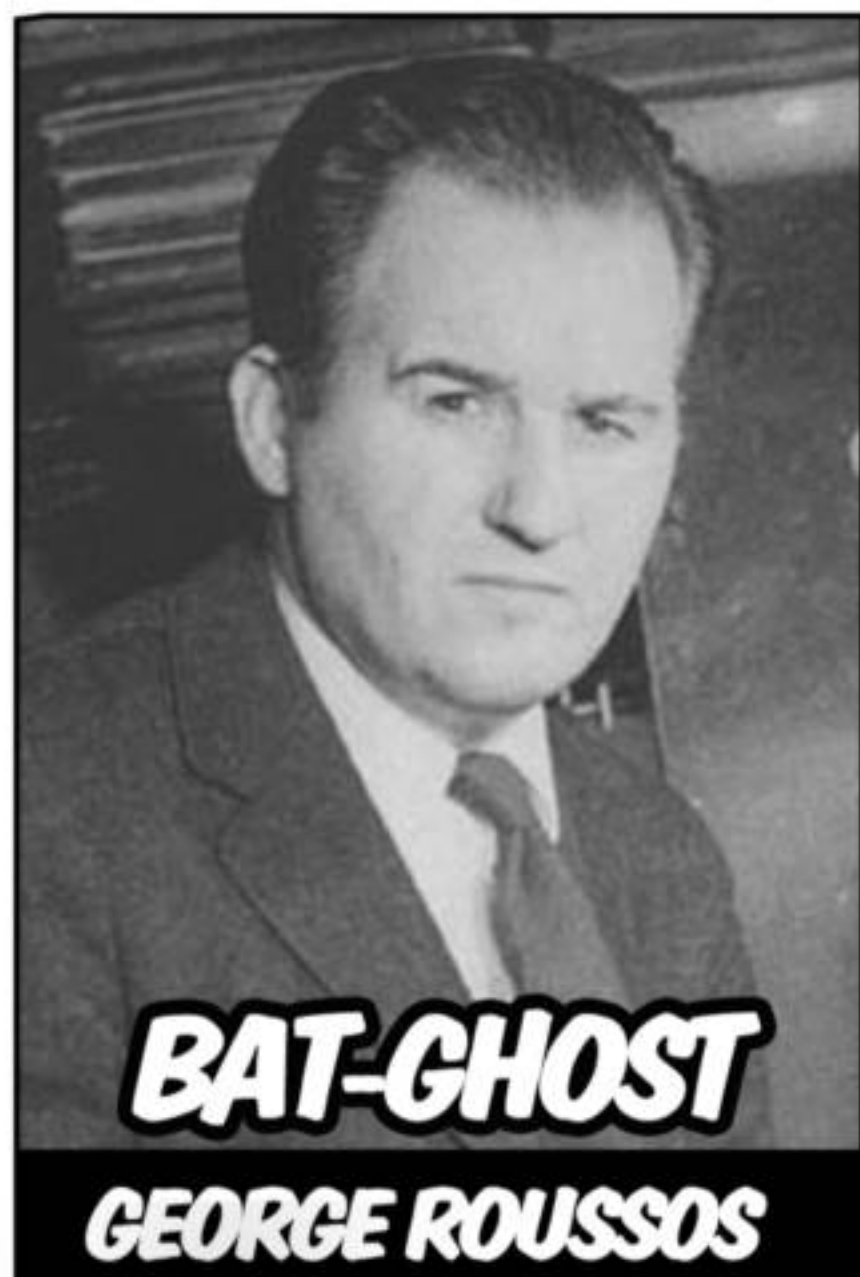
A year after Finger’s death, then-publisher of DC Comics Carmine Infantino wrote a touching eulogy to Finger that gave credit where credit was long overdue. In full contradistinction to Kane’s long-standing claim that his creation of Batman was a solo act, Infantino wrote, “Batman has lost a father, one of his two real fathers, that is.” Sadly, Bill Finger never saw his name appear on a first-run Batman story during his lifetime.

Did Bob Kane ever write Batman? In a 1965 letter to the fanzine “Batmania,” Bob Kane stated, “Although Bill Finger literally typed the scripts in the early days... he wrote the scripts from ideas that we mutually collaborated on, and many of the unique concepts and story twists also came from my own fertile imagination ... many a story I ‘silently’ wrote by giving Bill the premise, and he took the ball from there.”

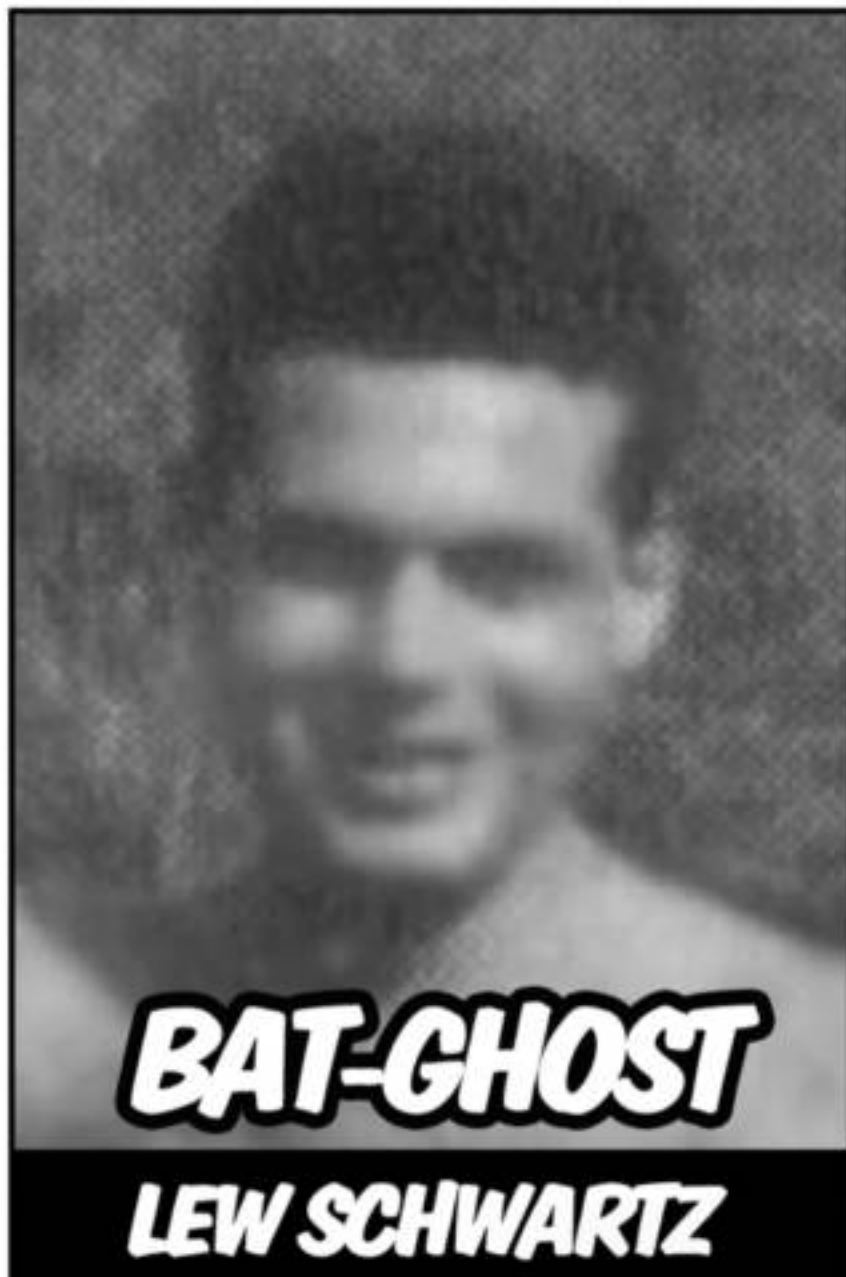
“KANE DID NOT WRITE.”

We can dismiss Kane’s claim immediately as sheer braggadocio, because it is universally acknowledged that Bob Kane never actually WROTE a Batman story.

Early Bat-tales were written by Bill Finger and Gardner Fox, a lawyer who gave up practicing law during the



BAT-GHOST
GEORGE ROUSSOS



BAT-GHOST
LEW SCHWARTZ



BAT-GHOST
DICK SPRANG

depression and went to work for DC in the late 1930s, co-creating the Golden Age (original) Flash, Hawkman, and the Justice Society of America.

DC historian E. Nelson Bridwell put it bluntly in his introduction to a 1971 collection of Bat-stories: “Kane did not write the stories, though he often had a hand in creating the characters in them.”

So, it is absolutely certain that Bob Kane never actually wrote a single Batman story. And his sometime-claim to have created the character all by himself, when he was as young as age 14, without Finger, is complete hogwash.

BOB KANE'S BAT-GHOSTS

When Bill Finger passed away in ill health and desperate poverty at the young age of 59, it appears Kane finally started to feel a twinge of remorse... maybe.

In his 1989 autobiography, “Batman and Me,” Kane mixed fact with fiction when he wrote, “Now that my longtime friend and collaborator is gone, I must admit that Bill never received the fame and recognition he deserved. He was an unsung hero.”

“Because he came into the strip after I had created Batman, he did not get a by-line... I never thought of giving him a by-line and he never asked for one. I often tell my wife ‘If I could go back 15 years, before he died, I would like to say ‘I’ll put your name on it now, you deserve it.’”

But lip service notwithstanding, Kane never made a serious effort to have Bill Finger's name attached to Batman as a CO-CREATOR of the character. Which is exactly what he was.

Yet in 1965, Kane stated, in no uncertain terms, “In the ‘Golden Age’ of Batman, I penciled, inked, and lettered

my strip by myself ... The Truth: I still draw about 90% of all Batman stories. I do all the stories for Batman bi-monthly, and share Detective Comics with Infantino, who draws every other one. Infantino now does all the covers for Batman and Detective Comics.”

Is this, as Kane insists, “The Truth”? Let’s start at the beginning. Bob Kane did draw the first Batman story in Detective #27, and no one disputes this — but as we shall soon see, for Kane, the word “draw” was often interchangeable with the word “trace.”

In “Batman and Me,” Kane contradicts his earlier statement and admits, “In the early forties, Jerry [Robinson] was hired away from me by DC... they allowed him to draw and ink complete Batman stories by himself, as well as his own covers.”

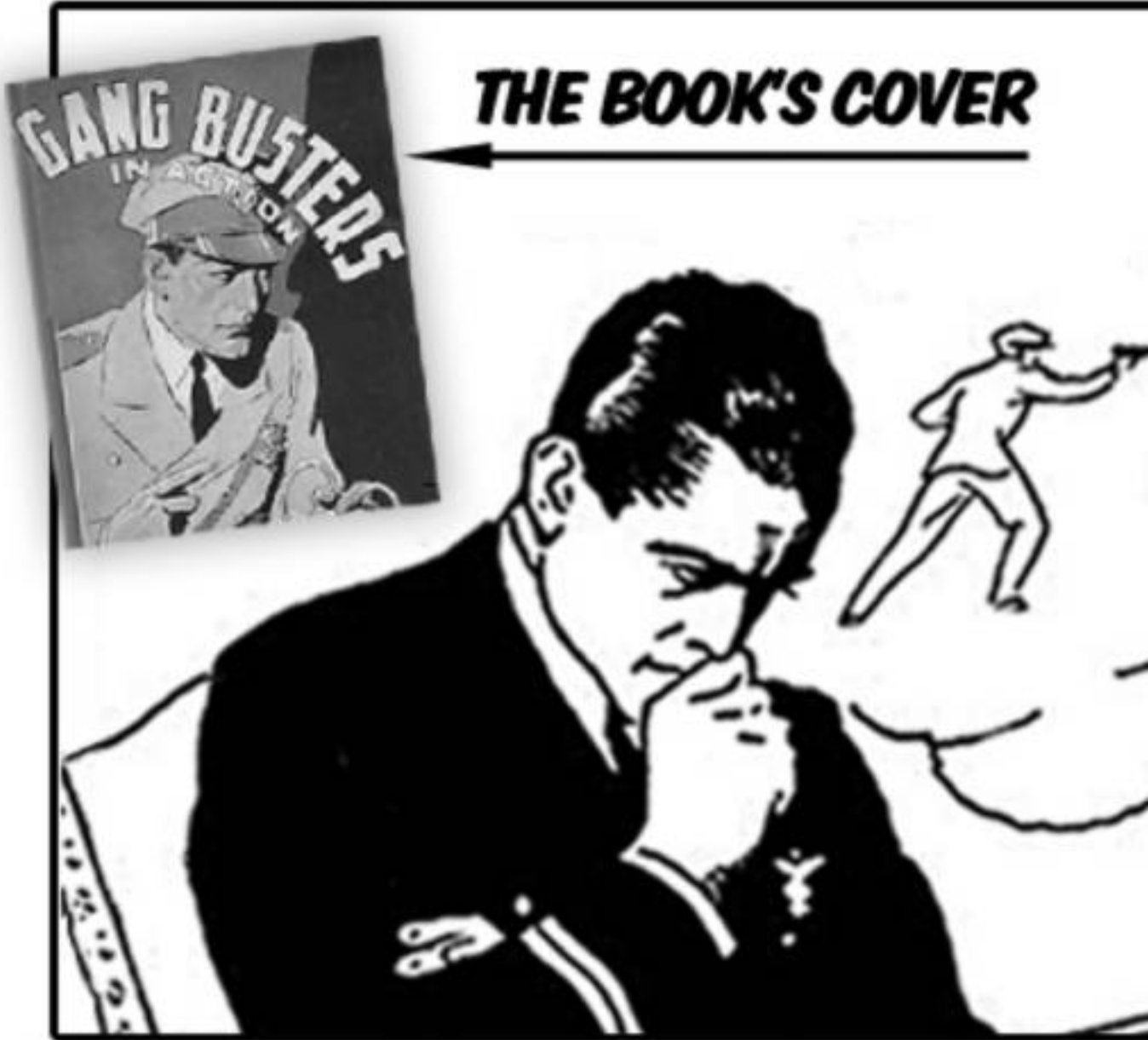
When Bat-Man’s popularity exploded, so did his page count. Kane hired several artists to help him keep up with demand. Batman was eventually drawn by a host of ghosts, including James Robinson, Jim Mooney, Stan Kaye, Win Mortimer, Mort Meskin, Dick Sprang, Lew Schwartz, Sheldon Moldoff, Charles Paris, Carmine Infantino, Fred Ray and Jack Burnley.

According to comic historian Mark Evanier, “There were two kinds of Bob Kane ghosts. Bob contracted with DC to provide a certain number of pages per month and he hired men like Sheldon Moldoff and Lew Sayre Schwartz to draw them. But DC needed more pages of BATMAN art than that, and so the DC editors hired men like Dick Sprang, Jim Mooney, Winslow Mortimer and Curt Swan to draw stories that never went anywhere near Kane or his studios.”

“As per Kane's deal with DC,” Evanier continues, “no one else’s name could appear on them but his, but it would be wrong to suggest that Mooney (for example) was a



ABOVE, LEFT: TWO PANELS FROM A BIG LITTLE BOOK DRAWN BY HENRY VALLELY. BOB KANE SWIPED THESE PANELS AND JOINED THEM TOGETHER FOR THE "BATMAN" ORIGIN STORY, PICTURED ABOVE RIGHT.



ABOVE: KANE SWIPED THIS PANEL DIRECTLY FROM HENRY VALLELY, BUT THE COLORIST MISREAD LINES INDICATING THE LEFT HAND, AND COLORED THEM AS FOLDS IN BRUCE'S ROBE.



ABOVE: THE APE MAN WENT BATS WHEN BOB KANE SWIPED THIS TARZAN POSE BY HAL FOSTER FOR BATMAN'S ORIGIN STORY, WRITTEN BY FORMER LAWYER GARDNER FOX.

Kane assistant. Or Sprang or Infantino or any of about two dozen others who did Batman art for DC."

Other early Batman adventures appearing in Detective Comics were finished by Sheldon Moldoff and George Roussos, who penciled backgrounds in addition to refining Kane's main figures.

So, to sum it up, Kane's claims that he did virtually everything on the early Batman stories is totally false.

Ghosting was a common practice in the comic industry at this time, but Kane took it to extremes. Each of Kane's ghosts apparently thought they were his ONLY ghost. Kane viewed them as employees, and never discussed with them the fact that there were others — even though Bob Kane used enough ghosts to HAUNT him for an eternity.

"I liked Bob," Jerry Robinson says. "He was very personable. I must say that he had a pretty big ego. Bill [Finger], on the other hand, did not. He was very quiet, intense, unassuming and insecure. His position vis-à-vis Bob made him more insecure, because while he slaved working on Batman, he wasn't sharing in any of the glory, or the money that Bob began to make."

Bob Kane's swipes, which at this point have to be called outright plagiarism, continued from Batman's inception to his origin story, in Spring 1940. Both tales are replete with Kane's tracings from two Big Little Books illustrated by Henry Vallely, "Gangsters in Action" and "Junior G-Men and the Counterfeiters."

The original panels are shown side by side with Kane's blatant swipes on the opposite page, and these are just a few of the most obvious examples. The whole story is rifled with swipes, as is most of Kane's work.

For example, the last panel of Batman's origin story (pictured opposite page, bottom) features a classic Batman pose that Kane stole from a Tarzan drawing by Hal Foster, pictured opposite.

This obvious lift was first pointed out in Brian Kane's "Hal Foster: Prince of Illustrators, Father of the Adventure Strip."

"IT WAS ALL BILL FINGER"

Jerry Robinson recalls, "I felt that I was part of a team. Unfortunately Bob did not feel that way, most of all with Bill. He should have credited Bill as co-creator, because I know; I was there. The Joker was my creation, and Bill wrote the first Joker story from my concept. Bill created all of the other characters... Penguin, Riddler, Catwoman. He was

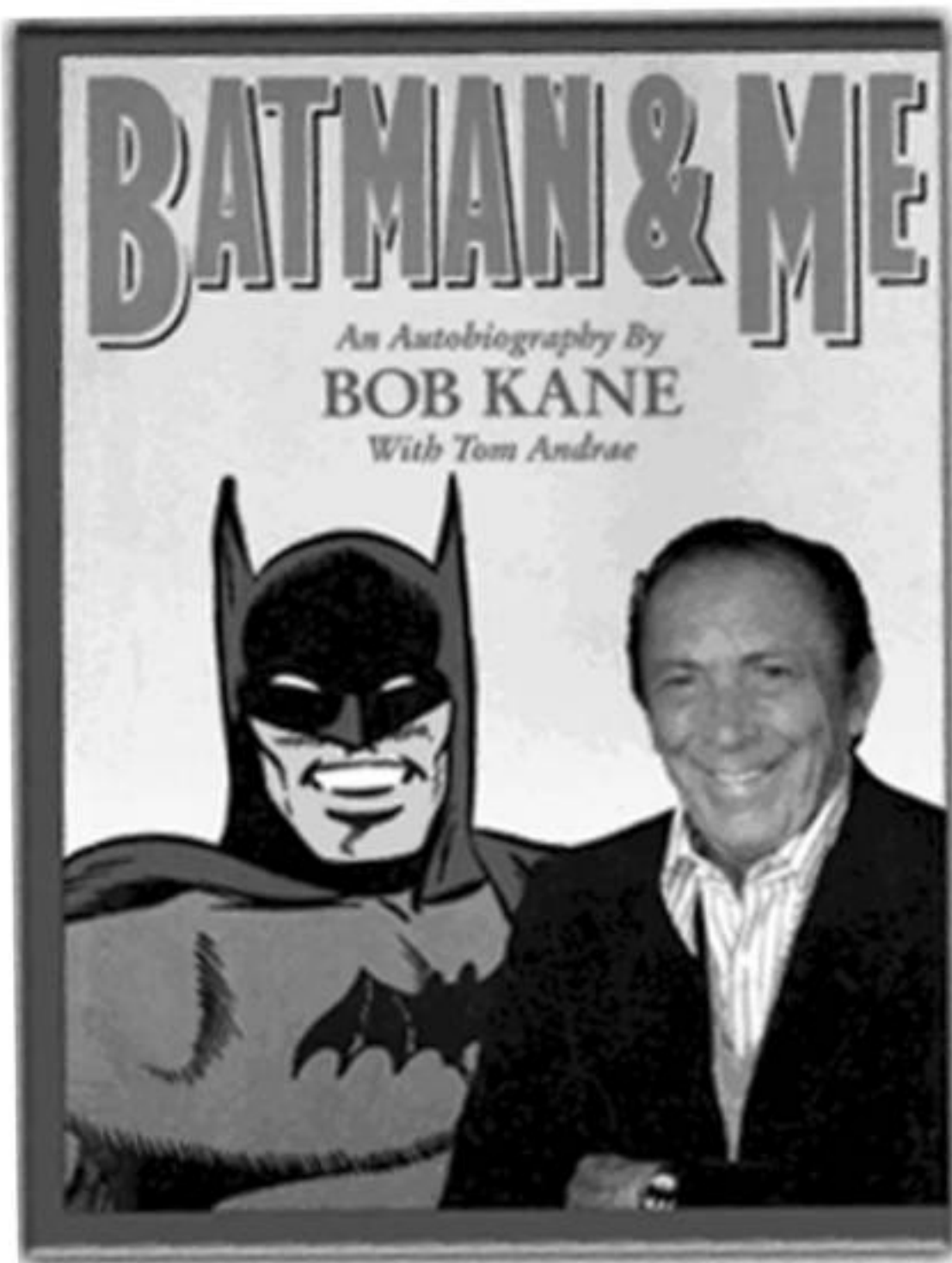


"THE TRUTH: I STILL DRAW ABOUT 90% OF ALL BATMAN STORIES. I DO ALL THE STORIES FOR BATMAN BI-MONTHLY, AND SHARE DETECTIVE COMICS WITH CARMINE INFANTINO."

—BOB KANE

**"HA HA HA,
HA HA!"
—THE MAN
WHO
LAUGHS**





ABOVE:
BOB KANE'S AUTOBIOGRAPHY, "BATMAN AND ME." IN THE BOOK, KANE CLAIMS HE DREW BATMAN ALMOST ALL BY HIMSELF, YET THE COVER ART ON THE BOOK WAS ACTUALLY DRAWN BY JERRY ROBINSON.

OPPOSITE PAGE:
BOB KANE'S GRAVE SITE GETS AN UNEXPECTED VISIT FROM THE PULP HERO WHO SECRETLY INSPIRED BATMAN, THE SHADOW.

very innovative. The slogans, the Dynamic Duo and Gotham City -- it was all Bill Finger."

Kane's ego and penchant for swiping were well-known throughout the comic industry, and tales of his selfishness abound.

According to Neil Gaiman, "No one else who did anything got any credit in Bob Kane's head. The other people who drew Batman — even Neal Adams, or Frank Miller — in Bob's mind, were just his 'ghosts.' The only thing that was important to Bob Kane was Bob Kane."

THE HAUNTING OF ROBERT KANE

When Kane passed away in 1998, he was 83 years old. Kane was survived by his wife, Elizabeth, daughter Deborah, and sister, Doris. The bizarre inscription on his comic-book shaped grave marker (complete with bat-signal) reads:

"Robert Kane aka Bob Kane — GOD bestowed a dream upon Bob Kane, Blessed with divine inspiration and a rich imagination, Bob created a legacy known as BATMAN. Introduced in a May 1939 comic book, Batman grew from a tiny acorn into an American Icon. A 'Hand of God' creation, Batman and his world personify the eternal struggle of good versus evil, with GOD's laws prevailing in the end. Bob Kane, Bruce Wayne, Batman, they are one and the same. Bob infused his dual identity character with his own attributes: goodness, kindness, compassion, sensitivity, generosity, intelligence, integrity, courage, purity of spirit, a love of all mankind. Batman is known as the 'Dark Knight,' but through his deeds he walks in the light of a higher power, as did his creator, Bob Kane!"

We're almost done. Here comes the end of the story. The part where the hero confronts the villain face to face, and dispenses justice.

In Batman stories, it's the part where Batman hands the bad guy over to the law. But in Shadow stories, particularly the radio dramas, it happens quite differently. The Shadow doesn't take anyone to jail. Instead, he rises up from a splotch of darkness in the corner, guns in hand, to carry out justice *personally*.

First, he calls out the villain's **name**, then he lists the evil one's wretched **crimes** in uncanny and shocking detail. Finally, a cold gleam in his eyes, he administers **justice**. Pleas for mercy, excuses and lies fall on deaf ears, because *nothing* can be hidden from him. In case you haven't heard, *The Shadow knows*.

Here it comes, reader... the haunting confrontation comic book nation has been dreaming about for more than SEVEN DECADES. It's Judgment Day -- time for the self-styled "sole creator" of the Dark Knight to be called to account by the Knight of Darkness himself... THE SHADOW! (See opposite page.)


ROBERT KANE aka BOB KANE

OCTOBER 24, 1915 - NOVEMBER 3, 1993

GOD bestowed a dream upon
Bob Kane. Blessed with divine
inspiration and a rich imagination,
Bob created a legacy known
as BATMAN.

Introduct
comic boo
tiny acor

**ROBERT
KANE!**

**DUPLICITOUS
GLORY
HOUND!**

YOU HAVE TRACED,
COPIED, SWIPED, PLAGIARIZED AND
PURCHASED THE WORK OF **OTHER ARTISTS**
FOR YOUR ENTIRE CAREER! YET THIS OFFENSE IS
COMPARATIVELY **MINOR**, AND HARDLY UNIQUE! FAR WORSE
IS THE FACT THAT YOU **WALLOWED** IN FAME AND
FORTUNE EVEN AS YOUR SUPPOSED FRIEND AND
PARTNER, **BILL FINGER**, LAY ON HIS DEATH
BED, AND THEN PASSED AWAY IN
WRETCHED POVERTY!

YOU ADMITTED HIS ROLE
ONLY WHEN MOUNTING **EVIDENCE** WOULD
ALLOW **NO OTHER** POSSIBILITY, AND THE FEW,
PITIFUL SCRAPS OF RECOGNITION YOU **FINALLY**,
BEGRUDGINGLY THREW TO BILL FINGER CAME ONLY
AFTER HE HAD PASSED AWAY. YET YOU, **ROBERT KANE**,
ARE **ENTOMBED** AS ONE WHO "WALKED IN THE LIGHT
OF A HIGHER POWER." AND THEREFORE,
LET THAT **HIGHER POWER** ALONE
BE YOUR **JUDGE!**

STAND BEFORE **HIM**, AND
DARE TO AFFIRM THAT YOU HAVE KEPT **HIS**
COMMANDMENTS! BUT DO SO AT THE **COST** OF YOUR
ETERNAL **SOUL**, FOR ALL WHO DARE TO LIE IN **HIS** PRESENCE
DOOM THEMSELVES TO BE HAUNTED, FOR ALL
ETERNITY, NOT BY THE **LIGHT** OF A
HIGHER POWER, BUT BY...
A SHADOW!

A "Hand of God" version.
Batman and his world personify
the eternal struggle of good
versus evil, with GOD's love
prevailing in the end.

Bob Kane, Bruce Wayne, Batman -
they are one and the same. Bob
infused his dual identity character
with his own attributes: goodness,
kindness, compassion, sensitivity,
generosity, intelligence, integrity,
courage, purity of spirit, a heart for
all mankind.

Batman is known as the "Dark Knight",
but through his deeds he walks in the
Light of a Higher Power, as did his
creator - Bob Kane!

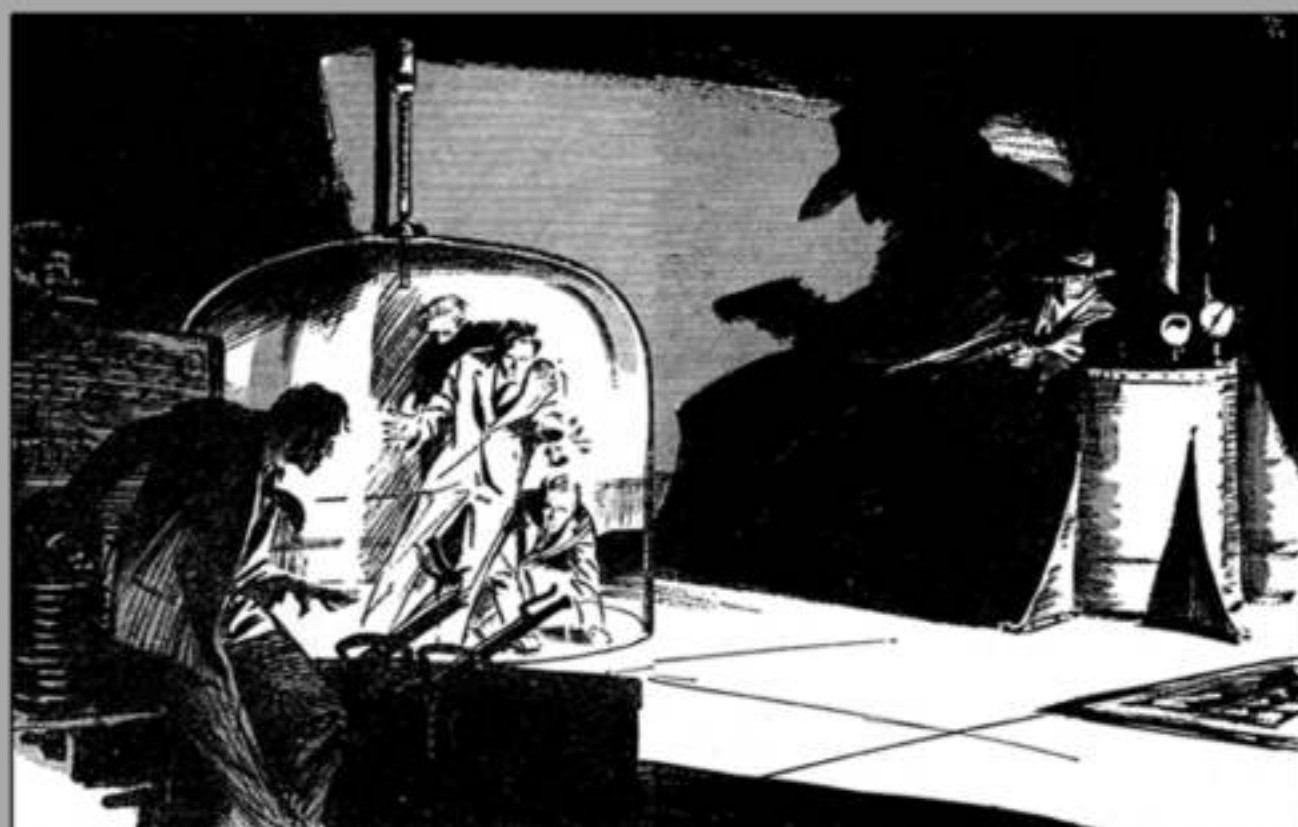
Beloved Husband, Father, Grandfather
and Friend. Forever in Memory.

The End

**WHO WAS
THE REAL
INSPIRATION
FOR BATMAN?
THE SHADOW
KNOWS!**



**ABOVE: TOM LOVELL'S SHADOW HAS A ROOFTOP ENCOUNTER; SO DOES "BOB KANE'S" BATMAN.
BELOW: THE SHADOW RESCUES PRISONERS IN A JAR (LEFT), AND SO DOES THE BATMAN (RIGHT).**



FORESHADOWING THE BATMAN

BY ANTHONY TOLLIN

PULP WRITER THEODORE TINSLEY'S PLOT for "Partners of Peril" might sound familiar to legions of comics fans who have never read his 1936 Shadow novel, because every key plot point from it was lifted by Bill Finger for Batman's 1939 debut story, "The Case of the Chemical Syndicate."

Finger, Batman's co-creator, freely admitted that his "first script was a take-off on a Shadow story." Bob Kane also acknowledged The Shadow as a major influence on Batman's creation. "I suppose both The Shadow's cloaked costume and double-identity role, as well as the extraordinary acrobatics of Douglas Fairbanks, Sr., did more to my subconscious to create the character and personality of Batman than any other factors," Kane once said.

Later statements by Kane assigned more credit to Johnston McCulley's Zorro, as portrayed by Fairbanks in the 1920 film *The Mark of Zorro*. However, it now appears that even the connections to Zorro and Fairbanks' acrobatics may have originated with Bill Finger rather than Bob Kane.

As historian Jerry Bails observed, "Bill maintained (well into the 1960s) a file of Douglas Fairbanks, Sr. photo stills. He showed me the file and said that he would attach selected photos to finished scripts for Bob and his assistants to use as models. I recognized pose after pose. The stills I saw (and had never seen before that date) were the familiar swinging poses that characterized the Acro-Batman that was so popular in my youth."

Kane's claims of a Zorro influence were accepted for years even though there is virtually nothing of Zorro in the first year of Batman. The grim Batman mimics the somber Shadow, not the devil-may-care caballero, while Bruce Wayne's actions parallel Lamont Cranston's, and lack the effete behavior of Don Diego.

Certainly, the friendship between a police commissioner and his crimefighting ally's alter ego had already been developed in *The Shadow Magazine* and the popular radio series. Kane fully participated in the Bat-adaptation of "Partners of Peril," swiping a rooftop scene and laboratory machinery from Tom Lovell (see panels on opposite page).

Many other elements from *The Shadow Magazine* filtered into Batman stories. The Dark Knight inherited The Shadow's talent for escapes from diabolical death traps, beginning with "Partners of Peril's" glass gas chamber in *Detective Comics* #27. Batman's mastery of escape was a legacy from Houdini to his biographer Walter Gibson and on to Bill Finger via *The Shadow*.

"Partners of Peril" is the smoking gun that proves the Shadow/Batman connection. It also raises questions about Bob Kane's actual contribution to Batman's creation.

It's fair to ask: If Bill Finger's first Batman script was lifted from an earlier Shadow novel and the writer also suggested the Caped Crusader's bat-eared cowl, bat-scalloped cape, black- and-gray costume and utility belt, what did Kane personally contribute to the feature that bears his creator credit, other than its title?

In later years, Bob Kane publicly lamented that Bill Finger had not shared byline credit, though the artist claimed to be the sole creator of Batman while Finger was alive, even threatening lawsuits against researchers who reported the writer's contributions.

While his initial Batman story was lifted from *Partners of Peril*, Bill Finger quickly developed into one of comics' most innovative scriptwriters. The strip that had started as a virtual clone of *The Shadow* came into its own with the introduction of Robin, the Boy Wonder—a character that brought a touch of humanity to the formerly grim Batman, and provided a point of



identification for young readers.

Even Gibson recognized the value of Batman's sidekick, and provided the Master of Darkness with a similar protégé, Shadow Jr., in Shadow comic books.

Theodore Tinsley has long been overshadowed by Walter Gibson, and is remembered primarily as "the other Shadow writer" who crafted 27 capable fill-in stories utilizing the characters and formats originated by his illustrious predecessor.

However, with the discovery that his premier Shadow novel provided the inspiration for Batman's creation, Tinsley must now be recognized, along with Gibson, as a major figure in the development of one of our iconic comic book heroes. Without the Knight of Darkness, there would be no Dark Knight.

LIKE THE BATMAN, THE JOKER ALSO HAD predecessors in Ted Tinsley's pulp stories. Three years before the "Clown Prince of Crime" debuted in Batman

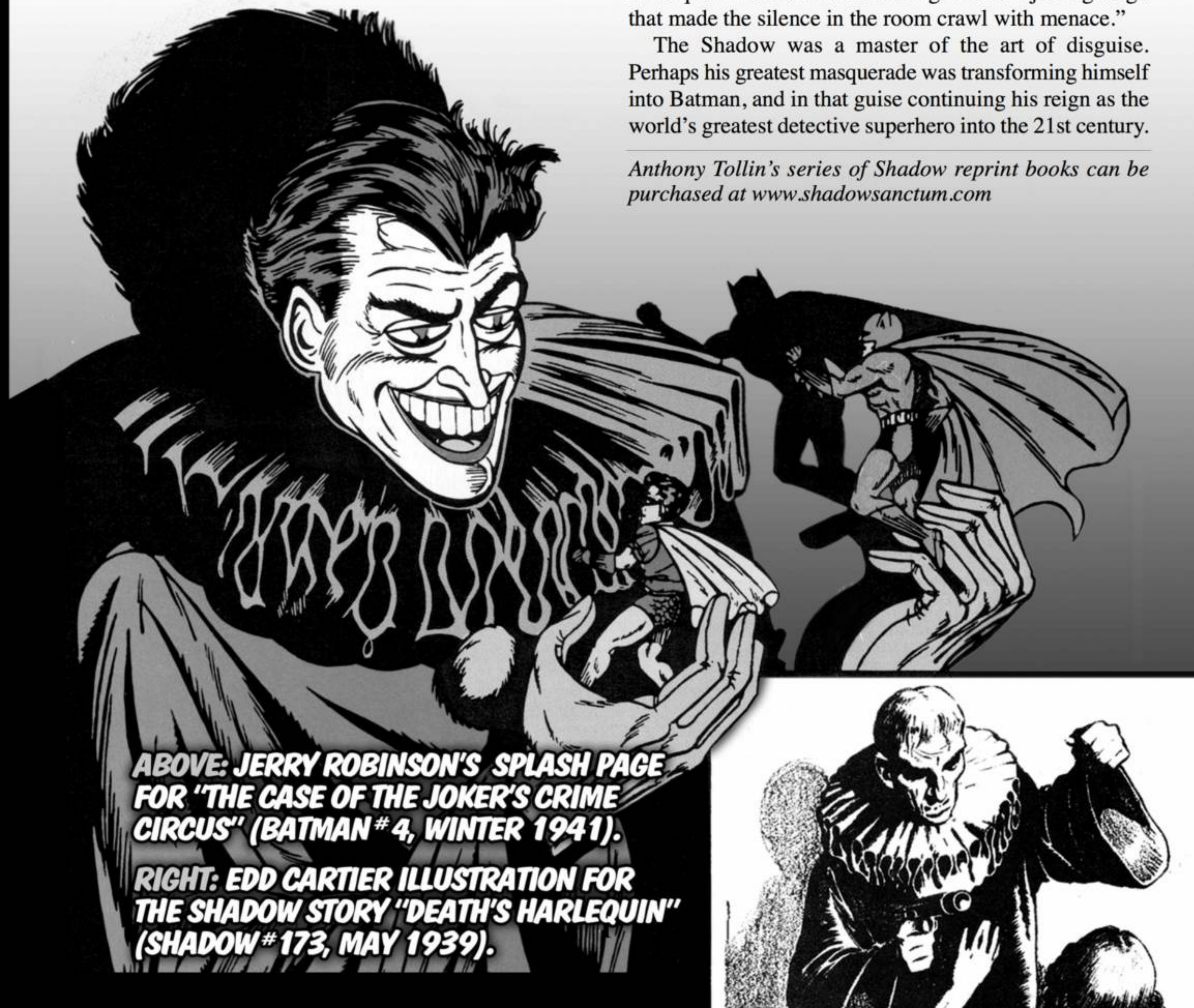
number one, police detective Bulldog Black encountered a white-faced crime boss called The Joker in the July 1937 issue of The Whisperer (whose alter ego of Police Commissioner James Gordon was borrowed by Bill Finger for Batman's police contact).

An avid card enthusiast, Tinsley had featured another Joker in an earlier story. In the March 1933 issue of All-Detective Magazine, the Scarlet Ace's sinister plot is foiled by Major John Tattersall Lacy who trumps the master villain's blood-red token with his own calling card—the Joker!

Tinsley pitted The Shadow against a skull-faced clown in 1939's "Death's Harlequin" (pictured below). Like The Joker, Tinsley's Harlequin is a vision of madness: "The thin lips were drawn away from skull-like teeth. The cheeks were sunken and leathery. Dank black hair lay matted thinly on a baldish scalp the color of old parchment. A living corpse in the costume of a gay Harlequin! With a wide-muzzled gun. And a jeering laugh that made the silence in the room crawl with menace."

The Shadow was a master of the art of disguise. Perhaps his greatest masquerade was transforming himself into Batman, and in that guise continuing his reign as the world's greatest detective superhero into the 21st century.

Anthony Tollin's series of Shadow reprint books can be purchased at www.shadowsanctum.com



ABOVE: JERRY ROBINSON'S SPLASH PAGE FOR "THE CASE OF THE JOKER'S CRIME CIRCUS" (BATMAN #4, WINTER 1941).

RIGHT: EDD CARTIER ILLUSTRATION FOR THE SHADOW STORY "DEATH'S HARLEQUIN" (SHADOW #173, MAY 1939).

REMEMBERING BATMAN RETURNS



By Gregory Bray



THE HYPE

A sequel to *Batman*, as many have pointed out over the years, was inevitable. Rumors began circulating. I had purchased some sympathetically low budget documentary videos, one titled "Batmania," that discussed the character from the comics in brief, spent most of the time on the '60s series, and the fall out after, and then wrapped up introducing Burton's 1989 *Batman* film. At that time, the rumors were as follows: Cher as Catwoman, Robin Williams as The Riddler, and (the only one that hit pay dirt) Danny DeVito as the Penguin.

Robin Williams would have worked fine as a Gorshin-esque Riddler, and given the depth of his recent performances, I'm



sure a more stoic characterization would have suited him as well. To be honest, I have never been a Cher aficionado, and so this rumor was lost on me. Danny DeVito on the other hand? My acceptance would later turn to elation, as Danny has given us one of the most interesting and overlooked performances in recent American film.

The harder information began to circulate around 1991. Much of the information about the film came from sources such as "Comic Scene Magazine," and other magazines whose main purpose was to entice comic book fans with "coming soon" articles. It seemed that Annette Benning was selected for the role of Catwoman, Danny as the Penguin, and Keaton, of course, would be back as Batman.

When Annette Benning bowed out, the role was up for grabs. In a now famous appearance on the Joan Rivers show, Sean Young went on camera wearing a mock-up of a Catwoman costume, paraded around the front of the set, and demanded a screen-test. Interwoven in this footage were some home videos of her running around a Hollywood lot with a walkie-talkie, trying to interrupt a meeting between Burton and Keaton. At the time, I was in high school, and certainly not "in the know" of how to land a role in a major motion picture – having stated this,



Sean Young seemed hell-bent on ruining her career, with her pathetic and desperate attempts to get attention. If anything, she made herself look incredibly bizarre, and has not been seen in much since *A Kiss Before Dying* over twenty years ago.

She didn't get the part.

The next bit of information I read was about the sets. I remember feeling a pang of disappointment when I read that the wonderfully Wagnerian sets from *Batman* (1989) would not be utilized for any film property in the future. Tim Burton had several explanations for this, most of which were in retrospect. He desired to work with the people he had worked with on his other projects, as opposed to assigned studio personnel, and the death of designer Anton Furst had left him feeling melancholy. He desired a fresh start for *Batman*, and often discounted the word "sequel" as an undesirable term. In fact, during an interview with Jay Leno, he mentioned, "Fellini has films that have the same themes, but he would never call it *Satyricon 2*." When *Batman 2* rumors began to surface, I think most took it for granted it would either be titled *Batman 2* or *Batman II*.

It was my sophomore year of high school, and I had not spent a great deal of time following the development of the film. The internet was just post-infancy, so aside from some comic book themed periodicals, there was very little I could turn to. In fact, it wasn't until I caught a Show West segment on "A Current Affair" that spring that I had any inkling of what the characters would look like.

The footage from Show West began with a strange woman holding a microphone, standing in front of the Batmobile. She mentioned the title, *Batman Returns*. So, it's not *Batman 2* or *Batman II*? I immediately liked the title. It has an obvious nod to Frank Miller's 'The Dark Knight Returns.'

And then the footage came, and I felt slightly underwhelmed. The program did not show very much. Quick rooftop fight with Batman. "How could you? I'm a woman." A few bizarre glimpses of the Penguin, but no dialogue, and then a quick cut to Michael Keaton at Show West. "I'm in a little movie, called *Batman Returns*. And considering it only cost like nine-million dollars, we've got quite a picture" (audience laughs). The scene transitions back into *BR* where Catwoman, played wonderfully by Michelle Pfeiffer, says "To destroy Batman we must first turn him into what he hates the most," (A shot of Catwoman licking Batman's face) "Namely, us."

The scene ended. While I was not impressed with the penguin's aesthetic, I still was curious to see how he was going to be played. He was missing the monocle and was holding his hat. A cigarette holder anyone? Well, there's too much smoking in movies nowadays, maybe it's not that big a deal. Regardless of my mixed feelings, I was left wanting more.

More would arrive in the form of a trailer in the movie theater. Again, we had the Catwoman fight, some bizarre imagery, and then I heard Danny DeVito's voice, and my fears were laid to rest. "Maybe this isn't a good time to mention this, but my license has expired." "My dear penguins, the time has come to punish ALL of Gotham!" I loved the Penguin controlled birds, Penguin's umbrella, and Catwoman's performance. The trailer ended

with Keaton ("What do you want?"), DeVito ("You don't really think you'll win, do you?"), Pfeiffer (laughing on the bed), and snow blowing across the Bat-emblem.

I was excited. I saw some images that made me wince slightly, including a weird motorcycle helmet that looked like a skull, with superballs for eyes, but other than that, I was ready for the film.

Finally, I managed to go on to a Bulletin Board Service (think the internet of the early '90s), and read a breakdown of *Returns*. In this breakdown, Robin is mentioned, and it seems the Penguin is responsible for the Graysons' deaths. While it tied the Graysons into the story via the Red Triangle Circus, the treatment I read was far too forced and cluttered. I felt that Robin was entirely out of place in the story. I hoped that his character would skip this film and be introduced in a later installment. I got my wish.

The next bit of hype, I recall, was a half-hour special on *Returns* hosted by Robert Ulrich. In this special, they gave us some excellent interviews with the cast, with Bob Kane, and with Burton on his re-envisioning of the Penguin. Including his flippers. My excitement for this film built, but it was slightly different. Where as *Batman* 1989 seemed to promise a thinking person's action film, this film did not seem too focused on the action. Burton used the word "psychology" when defining the characters, and I really felt, and still feel, that this says a great deal about him as a filmmaker. He truly cares about his characters enough to make sure their actions are properly motivated.

MTV began its end of the hype-machine, including interviews by Chris Conolly with the cast of the film, and Cindy Crawford promising 'more bang for your seven bucks.'

Keaton stated "my hunch is, it's a better movie." McDonald's began its merchandising push, Kenner toys flooded the market (including a Penguin action figure that bore no resemblance to DeVito's character), and all seemed right with the world of the Bat.

I remember viewing the film, on the last day of Regents Exams, with my friends and father. The long line was buzzing with this film.



The anticipation differed than with *Batman* (1989). It was a desire to see what would come next. Already, people were discussing what *Batman 3* would be like, or what the title would be, or what villains needed to appear, or how Robin should be brought in, etc.

We sat down in the theater. After a few unremarkable previews, the film began.



When the opening concluded, my friend, Jay, turned to me and stated, "That was kind of a silly opening."

I had this odd feeling that I was in for a different kind of film – one that I was not entirely used to. I had no idea how much time and energy I would spend over the next twenty years interpreting the film and its components. I was in for a film that I would be writing about for a long, long time.

THE FILM

Some films are disposable action films. They entertain, they distract, but after all is said and done, not much has really happened over the past few hours that's worthy of reflection. I have nothing against these films.

Other films seem to want to say something more. They either hold up a mirror to ourselves as a society to say something deeper, such as Clint Eastwood's *Mystic River* (2003), or they hold up a funhouse mirror to explore human themes while not necessarily using characters we identify as humans – in this rather broad category I would include *Batman Returns*.

Returns is not a summer blockbuster flick. It's not a popcorn flick, nor does it pretend to be, despite studio bigwigs trying to find lines of merchandising opportunities through McDonald's. It's a film that tries to say something about human relations, human conditions, while using characters that are metaphorically heightened in comic book situations.

Each year, studios usher in bigger American blockbusters with an increasing amount of computer effects, inexpressive performances and poorly constructed screenplays. Mainstream Hollywood is not the type taken to alter the fabric of its own conventions and sanctified "classics." There are some extremes to bear in mind: satire is scarcely tolerable in Hollywood cinema, and sincere parody is often written off as a campy commodity. Experimentation within the art form is often met with commercial disdain banishing its auteur to "basement cinemas." So where is the common ground?

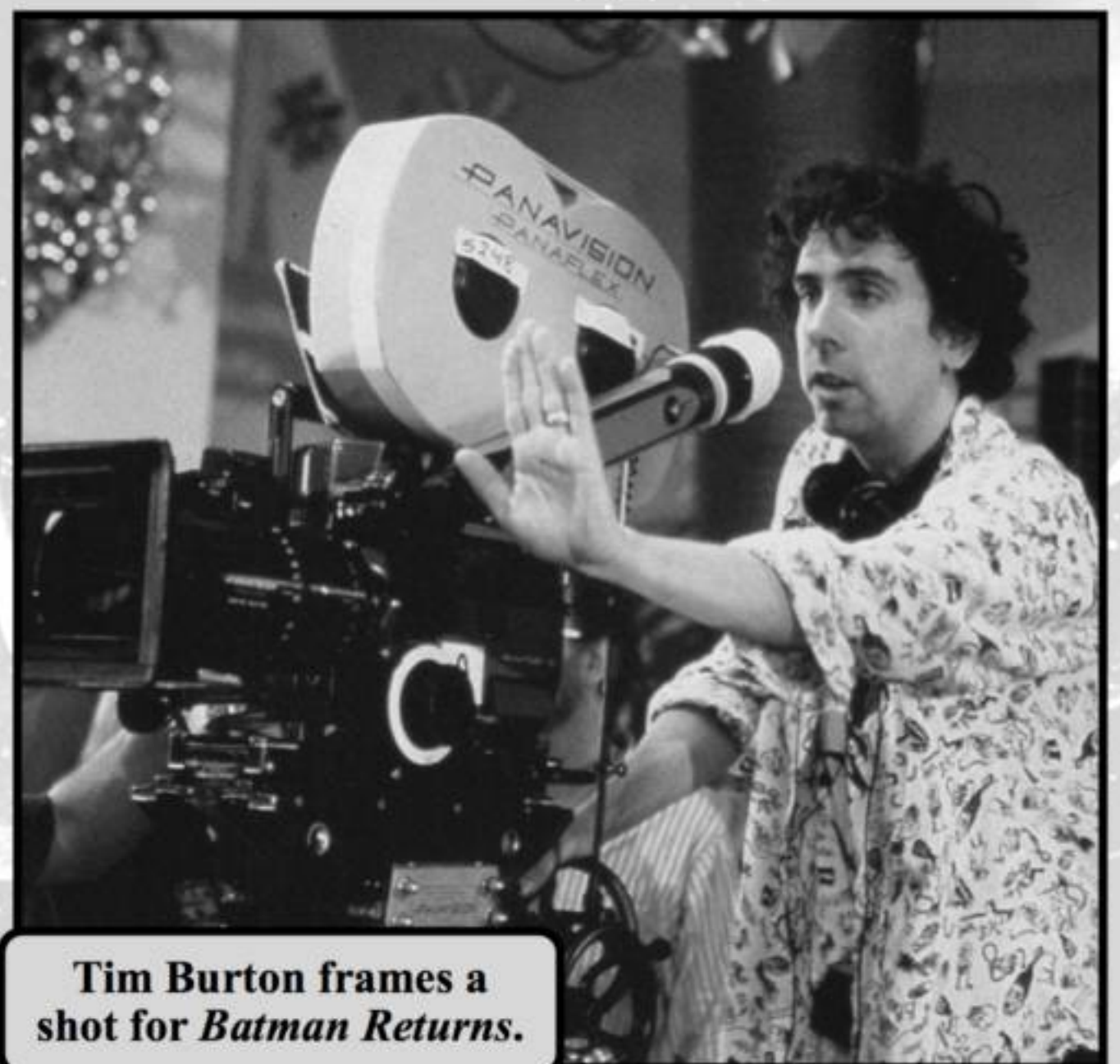
Tim Burton, as a modern auteur, fits nicely outside

the mold, but not to the extreme that his films will be limited to audiences whose total disdain for commercial cinema will keep them from multiplexes and movie houses. Throughout Burton's many worlds dark comedy is strategically contorted, subverting theme and Western culture by way of melodramatic tragedy, intentionally interwoven clichés and grand theatrics. While his plot line in *Batman Return* is at once extended, predictable (Batman defeats the villains) and over the top with cartoonish passion, it is also double-edged – it gives the audience the customary and the subversive in one sitting.

Batman Returns is a film richly morose in its language and representative of Burton's foremost ideals. It offers a multitude of ideas to explore, entering realms of the Gothic and the combined intertextuality, subversion and transformation come as a result of this. Liminality blares at us for over two hours of this text as we see a lack of clear resolution, lack of definition (but strong reflection) between the heroes and the villains, and the scrutiny of gender roles through the Catwoman/Selina Kyle character.

Unlike the commercialistic counterparts, it is in the characters, rather than the plot or the story line, that we understand the film's content. To be honest, the plot is disjointed, at best, though this is not necessarily a fault in the film's fabric. The viewer is led into a nether-world setting, pushing away any notions of reality. The intertextuality begins almost immediately with the Gothic setting. The city is very much a character in this film. The cornucopia of German expressionistic architecture, along with Victorian cathedrals supports this idea, blended with film noir style apparel and gadgetry one would expect in a superhero flick.

A timeless landscape partially free of modern constraints is magically created. Burton has placed four central characters (each one woven from intertextual material) that are Bruce Wayne/Batman (Michael Keaton), Max Shreck (Christopher Walken), Selina Kyle/Catwoman (Michelle Pfeiffer), and Penguin (Danny DeVito). Each character dons at least two separate and distinct



Tim Burton frames a shot for *Batman Returns*.

personalities. Bruce Wayne, much like the comic he's based on, is billionaire businessman during the daylight hours, Batman by night. Bruce Wayne is actually the mask for Batman. In the comics, we learn that when thinking to himself, he never refers to himself as "Bruce." This idea, although not blatantly stated, is apparent in the Burton translation. Selina Kyle adopts the mantle of Cat to fight that, which has created her – male dominance. Geeky, beaky, Selina Kyle is transformed into a new personality, at the hands of her employer, Max Shreck, who is the living personification of Gotham City. Penguin is the eyesore left to die by his parents due to his physical deformities. His psychology is a distortion of Batman's. He seeks revenge, but enacts it on the denizens of Gotham City. These bizarre characters come into this nether-world through intertextual references and forms of satire.

The Penguin is a re-envisioning of Robert Wiene's *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1919). Departing slightly, but not completely, from the comic view, this character is a "ghastly grotesque." Penguin's existence in the film extends the idea of the over-the-top villain as a means for intertextuality. Biblical references reveal themselves in his origin. His parents toss him in the sewers, and – much like Moses – floats away from his proper home and is found by others who would raise him. (In this case, penguins are his foster parents. I did mention this film's irreverence towards realism.) The reference to religious allegory does not end there. His plot is to kill every first-born son of Gotham City. The physical distortion is Dr. Caligari, the means to enact revenge is part The Angel of Death, and the method is very much the pied piper (as we see him attempting to lure children into the sewers). We are given visual signs of reincorporation. The Penguin clutches bars of his cage as a baby, then again the sewer grate before phase one of his revenge is enacted. In addition, he spits up black bile, which in Middle age English literature was considered one of the four humors – this one representing evil.



The Penguin bides his time beneath Gotham City.

Another prominent, duplicitous figure in this Gothic landscape becomes manifest in millionaire Max Shreck. Not coincidentally, Max Schreck is the actor's name who played the title character in F.W. Murnau's *Nosferatu* (1921). His duality reveals itself in his affection for his son, for whom he commits all his crimes. Shreck's love fosters his cruel deeds, including the near murder of his secretary Selina Kyle, to protect his legacy. At a greater level Shreck personifies the vampire spirit. No, he does not suck blood, however his legacy is a power plant that actually stores and stockpiles power from the city. In other words, he's sucking

Above (From Top to Bottom): The Bat (Michael Keaton), The Cat (Michelle Pfeiffer), and the Penguin (Danny DeVito), a twisted trio of tragedy.

out the life force. This again ties into his *Nosferatu* roots, as the vampire sucks the life force out of the living. The public, ever unaware of his philanthropist by day, metaphoric vampire by night, buys into his superficial

**Max Shreck (Christopher Walken),
Gotham's metaphorical vampire.**



clowns, and happy homemakers into cat-women." This style of romancing the public with rhetoric while not clearly having a political platform is a stab at the very heart of American politics. During a *Tonight Show* interview, Burton told host Jay Leno that the character was based on all "the current political candidates." It shows. The alliance between the two is blatant satire of the real life political situation.

**Count Orlok in *Nosferatu*,
played by actor Max Schreck.**



Shreck has a motif. Much like the "golden arches" of McDonald's, Shreck has a large cat's head corporate logo. It is at once reminiscent of Felix the Cat, and also an indication that Shreck has an eye on every area of Gotham City. It serves, most strikingly, as an indication of events to follow for secretary Selina Kyle, whom Shreck pushes out the window.

gestures and giving of baubles. The satire bites deeper when Max's plot is revealed.

Equating Max with a vampire is equally supportable by the coffin material lining his wall and the ascent up the staircase when Selina is working late – a visual reference to the now famous shot of the vampire rising from the coffin. His cufflinks are human molars (according to Christopher Walken in various interviews). In addition, the fright wig is indicative of German expressionism villains – even silent movie villains in general (see Professor Moriarty in *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* starring John Barrymore, for example, or *London After Midnight*, the infamous lost silent starring Lon Chaney, although he's not really a villain after all in that film).

Unable to sway the politicians to grant him the opportunity to construct the power plant, Max enlists the aid of the Penguin by posing him as a political candidate who will overthrow the mayor. Big business will be behind the political monster to ensure his deeds will be implemented. At the same time, the Penguin has a natural gift for American political rhetoric. After "saving" the mayor's baby, he turns to the public and proclaims "I may have saved the mayor's baby, but I refuse to save a mayor who stood by helpless as a baby while Gotham was ravaged by a disease; that turned eagle scouts into crazed



Resulting from his corruption, Selina Kyle is reborn as Catwoman. As Selina plummets from a high-rise window, canvas awnings slow her fall enabling her survival. Although not realistic, this action should be interpreted from a symbolic viewpoint. Upon hitting the asphalt, Selina's former self dies, and has a rebirth as Catwoman. Patriarchal domination results in a feminist character. The docile gender roles and altruistic leanings



Set construction of Gotham City for *Batman Returns*.

based on sex all but evaporate. Upon returning to her house, she makes short work of all her belongings. The smashed sign that read "Hello There" now blares "Hell Here." Just as Bruce Wayne is a mask for Batman, Oswald Cobblepot is a mask for Penguin, philanthropist Max is a mask for the vampyric counter-part, and Selina is an evasive front for the true personality. Catwoman and Batman may share numerous characteristics, but there is a departure when considering the pursuit of

justice. Although Batman is more of an anti-hero (very rarely do heroes place bombs on unarmed thugs, or blast them with an inferno of exhaust), his justice is limited to "evil-doers."

Catwoman is far more destructive and indiscriminate. This isn't to say that her justice has no foundation. Blurred are the lines between what is traditionally good and bad, right and wrong. This kind of moral ambiguity apparent in both the heroes and the villains lends itself to the post-patriarchal idea that the so-called heroes always act in the name of good, just as villains are evil due to internal malignity, with little external factors or explanation.

In fact, her character embodies the idea of both modern and postmodern thought. Selina is clearly the modern thought. She longs for a man to fill the void in her life, and create comfort and stability. On the other hand, Catwoman dismisses Selina's unattainable quest for completion through male companionship. This film presents us a woman who slips from forced conformity into the dual identities of her and the woman she once was. This comes to a head as her mind is overtaken by the pursuit of vengeance – namely, killing Max Shreck.



Selina Kyle's transformation into Catwoman represents only one of the many examples of duality in *Batman Returns*.



In her final scene, Catwoman has tracked down Shreck to Penguin's lair. She is given the option of killing Shreck or riding off with Batman into the sunset. Her line is as follows: "Bruce, I would love to live with you in your big castle, forever just like in a fairy tale. I just couldn't live with myself! So don't pretend this is a happy ending!" This subverts the audience expectation for some form of romantic reconciliation between the two. Throughout the film, Batman/Catwoman have been fighting, yet there lies an unspoken sexual attraction. Bruce and Selina, unaware of one another's alter ego until the third act, carry on a brief love affair. Bruce's plea to her follows with the removing of his cowl, to plead with her as Bruce Wayne. Catwoman has consumed Selina, this resulting from her inner repression.

Batman brings us to the concluding element in *Batman Returns*' analysis. His character, as previously mentioned, is a combination of aspects of the archetypal force of good, with liberal application of anti-heroism. (Batman's origin, although not shown in this film, is well known enough to not need detail. Bruce witnessed his parent's murder, and as he grew so did his pain. His pain was turned into Batman, so he could fight back against the world that created him, in the name of justice.)

In taking the role of the hero, Batman denounces public adulation. He is concealed in the persona of Bruce Wayne, a shrewd billionaire bachelor who spends his time brooding in his castle on the hill, or in frank business meetings with Shreck. Unlike Selina, Wayne is the emotional outlet for Batman. In this approach he becomes little more than an extension of Batman, having surrendered his soul to the crime-fighter the very night he first wore the Bat-suit. Burton seems to be playing with the notion that Batman and Bruce Wayne are two distinct personalities, being reconciled, rather than one being a mask for another.



To illustrate this point we draw on the episode where Bruce, in the Bat cave, is examining a series of articles on the Penguin's origins. Talking to Alfred, faithful butler of thirty-odd years, his voice is free of any menace – Wayne is equally at peace with him as he is with the public. Shortly thereafter, one identity relegated by another in a costume, Batman converses with the butler via remote intercom. The altered voice immediately surfaces; manifesting itself in a deep, mean rasp. Is this not the same man Bruce spoke to minutes earlier at Wayne Manor, to whom he confides his double-life, and thus needn't worry about concealing himself? This is reincorporated in the concluding scene. Batman, at the risk of revealing the face under the suit, tears off his cowl and the rasp, which so forcefully tells Shreck "You're going to jail," changes to the softer Wayne tone. The most telling moment, however, is when Bruce ascribes his familiar recognition of Selina (when he has in fact met her before, but as Batman) by inadvertently saying "I mistook me for somebody else." Here his intention was to say "I mistook you for somebody else," but with Batman/Wayne occupying this split psyche, words become mixed and they endanger a secret by telling truths.

At the end of the film, we see Bruce Wayne brood, just as he had in the beginning. There was no resolution with Catwoman, and Batman is never seen redeemed in the public eye after being framed, although there is a telling moment, during the coda, where we see the bat-signal

alight, and Catwoman stand to view it.



IS IT A GOOD BATMAN FILM?

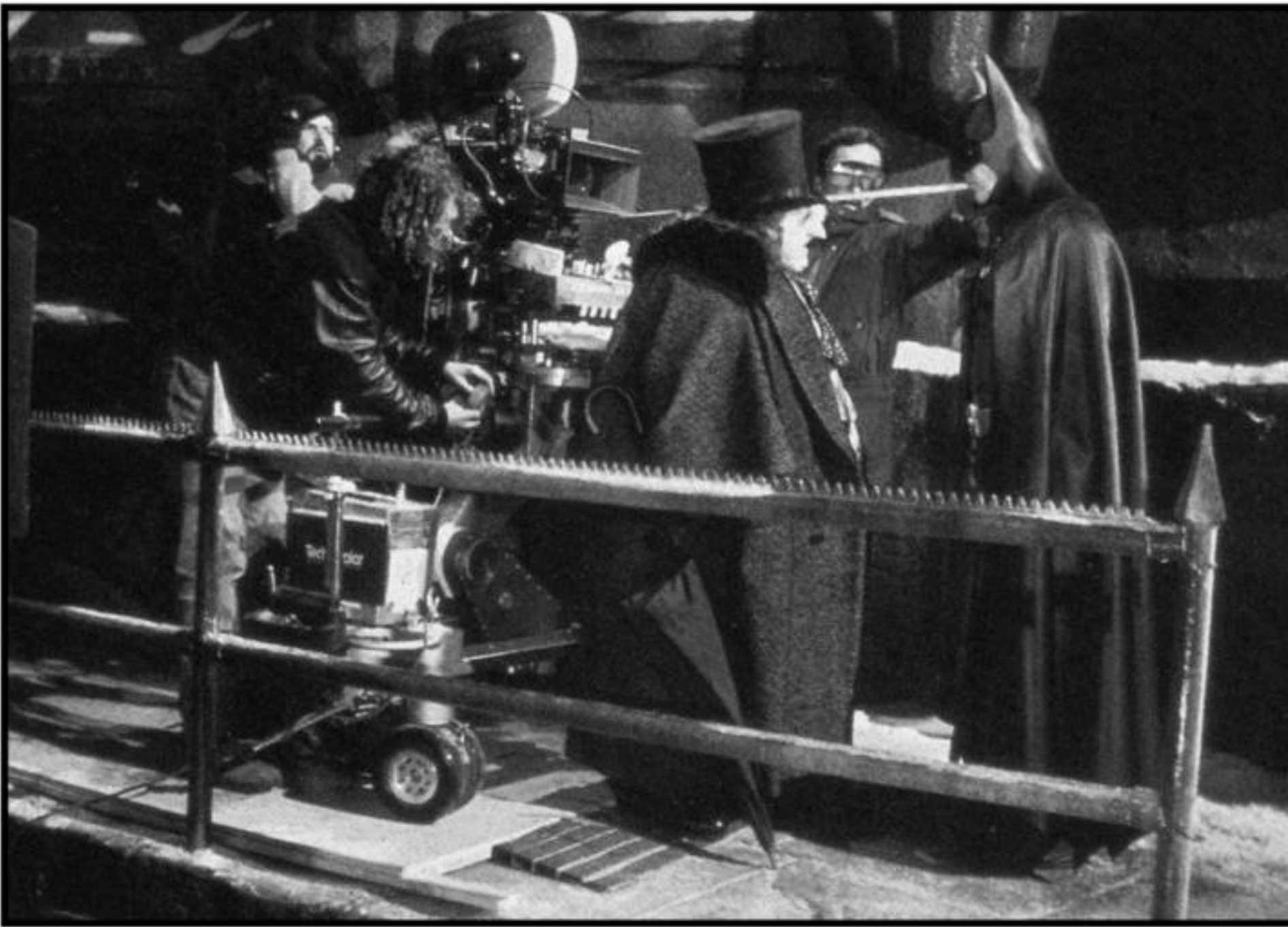
It is, in fact, a GREAT Batman film. We have studies of the German expressionism influence on *Batman Returns*, as well as an analytical reading of the work. But the ideas present in the film are from the comic book's source.

Let's begin with German expressionism. Batman creators, Bob Kane and Bill Finger, cite two very specific silent era works when discussing Batman's creative influences. The first is *The Bat Whispers*, from 1930. The film directed by Roland West featured a character who secretly killed people dressed as a bat.

The Man Who Laughs (1928), directed by Paul Leni, is another. The story focused on a man whose face was scarred by gypsies into a permanent rictus. In addition, many of the supernatural elements, from Dr. Evil, Dr. Hugo Strange, The Monk, Giants, etc., were present in the earliest comics. Looking over the hard-covered archives book, I can see many direct visual influences from the page to the screen.

In addition, the Penguin of the comics rejects the name Oswald Cobblepot, nearly as much as his onscreen counterpart. At least during the golden age run. His reimagining in recent comics as a kingpin is about as different from the original intent of the character, as, well, giving him flippers. Like his comic book equivalent, he does have some business and political aspirations, resulting from the rejection of his identity, and has an arsenal of umbrella-weapons at his disposal. If his character is not entirely narratively faithful from one medium to another, it's not that great a loss, considering he is being interpreted as one of Batman's 'tragic' villains.





In more recent comics, many villains have been given tragic origins. The Joker was a decent man, a stand up comedian, whose life was ruined in a day. Two-Face was Gotham's Apollo – a handsome District Attorney, who had a healthy dose of psychological baggage from his past, which exploded into an alternate personality. Just add acid. Mr. Freeze, as written by Paul Dini, is a man whose quest for revenge is entirely sympathetic, given what has been taken from him.

Burton's Penguin fits into this category of villain. His life began as a tragedy, we have some sympathy for him, but ultimately we know his actions have caused us to root for his downfall.

Catwoman perhaps is given the most faithful treatment in this film, with regards to the source material. Although her origin was updated in recent years, her first origin was that of a cat burglar known as The Cat. Eventually, she donned a costume. We learned, according to the Golden-Age persona, that Selina is actually a good person who, after surviving a terrifying accident (I believe it was a plane-crash) developed a second personality as a result of her head trauma. She walks the line between good and evil, and ultimately loses the “bump on the head” story, and admits some deeper turmoil. Elements of this reading are present throughout *Batman Returns*, from



Selina's origin, to quieter moments, such as those where she questions her motives – “why are you doing this?” This question is something she has posed in the comics before.

In addition, the visual of her being found in the alley by cats, after her fall, is visually lifted (more or less) from “Her Sister's Keeper.” Add the rooftop fights and meetings that have become common place for Batman and Catwoman, and you have something that is quite close to the comics.

Her motivation, in the film, is to get back at Shreck, by breaking into his store, and destroying a few floors of it. As mentioned earlier, Shreck is the personification of Gotham City. Here, she is getting back at Gotham itself. Of course, that she's also taking away from the rich and powerful serves the character's motivations as well.

Now, on to Batman. Batman is close to various interpretations of his comic book counterpart. There is no such thing as a “real” Batman, just preferred interpretations. His character has changed dramatically over the years. In the original comics, and *The Dark Knight Returns* (comics that Burton was influenced by), Batman kills. Many audiences today have a difficult time with this, as according to the updated Batman (courtesy of “Batman: Year One”) Batman has a far more rigid moral code, and would never commit murder. But in his earlier cases, such as “The Case of the Chemical Syndicate,” Batman pushes villains off rooftops, and threatens, “Tell me gentlemen. Or I'll kill you.” Machine guns are present on his vehicles, and he uses a machine gun to end a villain in DKR.



And then, there's the Adam West Batman.

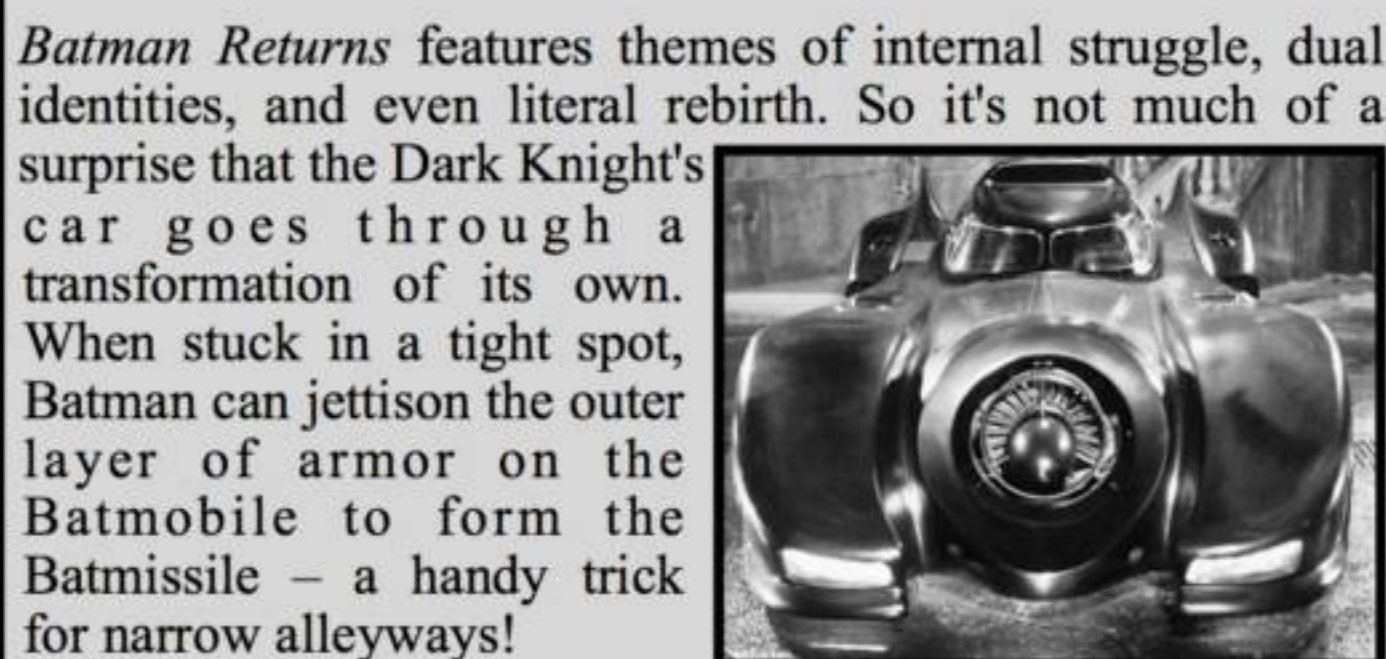
Or the comics from the 1950s, where Batman had quite a large Bat-Family, and visited other planets, dimensions, and waved to the public in broad daylight.

Batman's personality has evolved over the years too. I believe that Burton nailed a number of aspects of his persona, from the dual personality of businessman/loner

When I first viewed the film in the theater, I saw several children being dragged out by their irate parents. This was not a film for the kids, at all. McDonald's faced some heat due to its merchandising tie-ins, and many on the business end of the film and its merchandising, backed away from the film a bit.

While many critics were wowed, *Batman Returns* became a love it or leave it variety of film. The audience that fell in love with this version of Batman will defend it tirelessly, as those who did not enjoy this particular reading of the comic book legend, will never quite understand what the rest of us see in it.

Despite being the biggest blockbuster of 1992, with \$163 million, it paled in comparison to the financial success of the first film. It was apparent that Burton would not return in a directing role. Keaton dropped out of the next sequel soon after.

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IN DEFENSE OF THE NEON KNIGHT

BY
FLYNN COOK

HOW JOEL SCHUMACHER SUCCEEDED



Nothing golden can stay; nothing lasts forever. Or in this case, appreciation is fleeting these days. I remember that until the internet became what it is now, people seemed easier to please. Either that, or people's opinions morphed toward hatred. Critics will be critics, but the average moviegoer just seemed less picky.

Ghostbusters II was thoroughly enjoyed by everyone I knew. Nobody used to have a problem with any of the *Back to the Future* sequels, *Return of the Jedi* was very much beloved (comparisons to *Empire* be-damned), and the Batman movies (sans "that last one") were all great. Oh, how times change. Now when you hit the net, if there aren't complaints or hate thrown at Tim Burton's Batman flicks, it seems not to be a Batman film discussion at all. One constant, however, is the hate of Joel Schumacher's Batman films. Nolanites and Burtonites tend to agree with that one. "Nipples, Neon and Nincompoopery!" is what they cry.

Going back to the previous train of thought, I want those of you who can to remember back to 1995. Uh-huh. Everyone loved *Batman Forever*. But the years haven't been so kind to its legacy, and its sequel's reception didn't help things. Back in a time when a film's entertainment value was what mattered most, *Batman Forever* rose to the top of the box office food-chain to dominate its year of release. Not to mention the merchandising, the McDonald's tie-ins and the hit soundtrack album. Now, it's a pop-culture footnote, quashed by the drabness of Christopher Nolan's pseudo-thriller Batman films. While those films are to be lauded for their decision to be serious with the material, I remember when Batman wasn't a tool for nerds

to try to prove how sophisticated and deep they were for understanding the character. I remember a time when, much like the comic books that spawned him, he was a character of mystery and adventure. My personal preference is Tim Burton's pair, but make no mistake: Joel Schumacher's couple have a bum rap. And I'm going to unearth their hidden value.

Batman Forever: The Best One?

Let's get the obvious out of the way. There are neon lights all over Gotham. Giant, improbable statues in every corner; and between Jim Carrey and Tommy Lee Jones, there was no scenery left undigested. But if you're wise enough to look beyond dismissible trappings, you may find the richest character study of Bruce Wayne yet put to film, in a very hip movie. How's that for subtext? While Tim Burton explored Batman's psyche through the villains and how they compare to him, Schumacher goes for the hat-trick on his first outing: he questions Wayne's very identity and reason for being. And he does that by calling back to Burton's efforts (this is a sequel, after all).

Flashback: in the first film, Batman discovers the Joker murdered his parents, and suddenly he gets bloodthirsty (check it; he doesn't start killing until he makes this realization). He kills the bum, and everything's right, right? Maybe not. In *Batman Returns*, he's on a rampage, killing indiscriminately anyone who opposes him. When he sees himself reflected in the murderous vigilante Selina Kyle, he pulls back from the abyss, fighting with morality once more (instead of instant murder, he now warns Max Shreck "You're going to jail").



Attempting to redeem Catwoman (and himself) from the darkness of their craft, Bruce is spurned by her and is left unfulfilled. Did Burton intend this character arc? Only he knows for sure. But what we do know is that Schumacher and his scriptwriters saw these elements and ran with them, because Batman's conflict is at the heart of the film (even moreso fleshed-out in *Forever's* deleted scenes). The previous two films' arc for Bruce is made canon in his lecture about revenge to Dick Grayson in the film's second act:

BRUCE:

"Then, it will happen this way: you make the kill. But your pain doesn't die with Harvey; it grows [Murdering the Joker in the first film]. So you run out into the night to find another face. And another, and another. Until one terrible morning, you wake up and realize that revenge has become your whole life [His rampage in *Returns*], and you won't know why."

Bruce speaks from experience to Dick because he's been there, done that. In the film's conclusion, Batman is finally able to make peace with himself over his murdering history by steering Dick Grayson off the path he himself took. He takes the temptation away from Grayson by killing Harvey himself; his hands already aren't clean, and if he can save Dick from running too close to the abyss, he'll kill one last time.

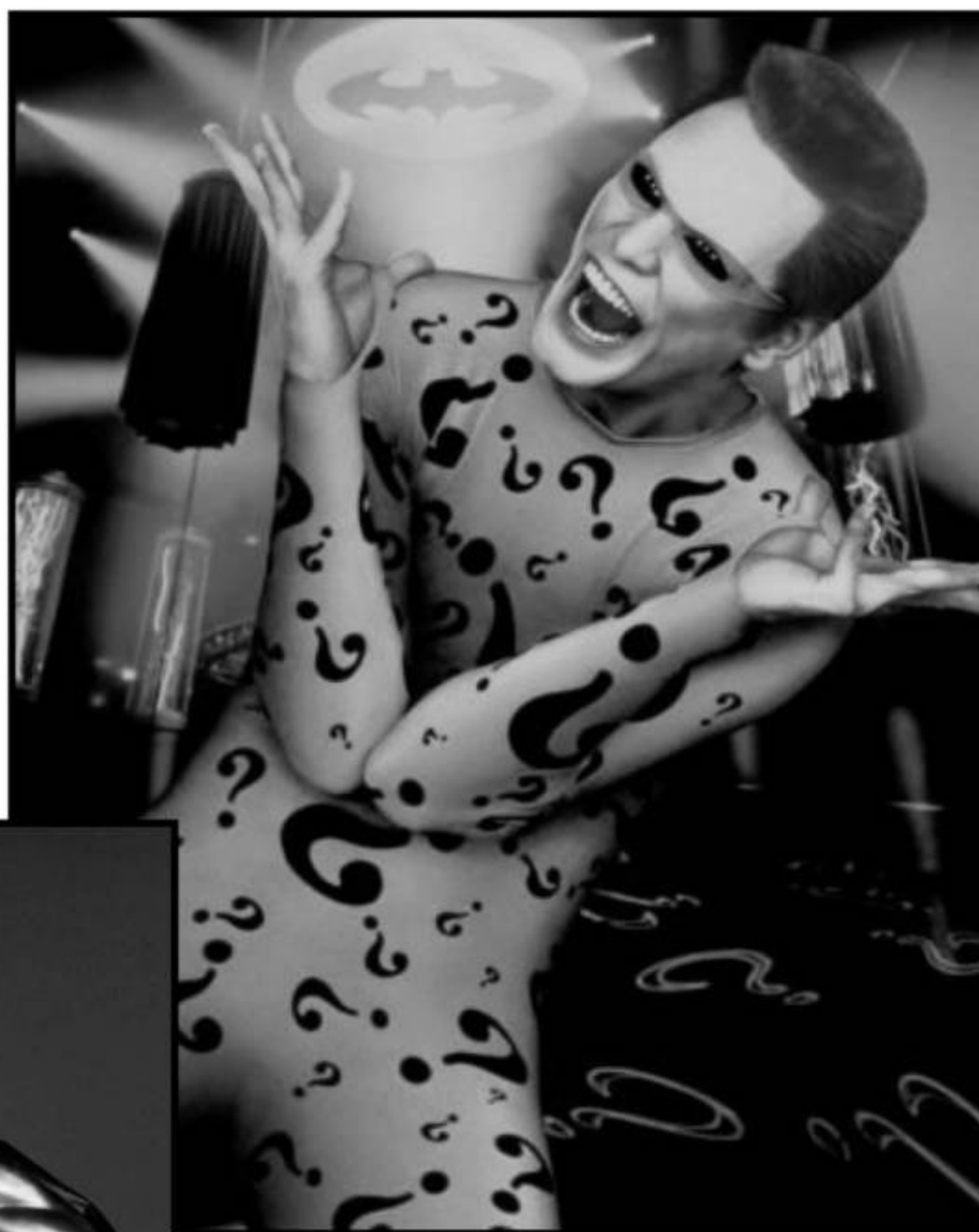
But that's tying up the Burton arc. What does Schumacher bring new to the table in *Forever*? The central element of the film (which admittedly is lessened by portions being deleted) is Bruce's inability to function properly as either Bruce Wayne or Batman. He doesn't know who he really is, and his worries about Dick following in his footsteps worsen his psyche, along with his guilt over Harvey's condition. The Riddler tests Bruce Wayne, while Two-Face tests Batman. To quote *Batman Begins*, he's "lost inside that monster of [his]."

Brilliantly and without being overbearing, the film enriches Batman's origin without becoming contrived. Bruce feels responsible for his parents' deaths. Unfortunately deleted from the film is a scene that finds Bruce rediscovering his father's journal, and reading the final entry; Bruce's movie choice was not the one accepted that fateful night out. They all went out to see a movie

of the parents' desire, absolving Bruce of his guilt; he is able to become one with his destiny as Batman. Hence in the finale, Bruce explains to a defeated Riddler that he "had to save [Chase Meridian and Robin] both. You see, I'm both Bruce Wayne and Batman. Not because I have to be. Now, because I choose to be." This coming after the excellent cliffhanger wherein he is forced to choose whom to save; Bruce's girlfriend Chase, or Batman's partner Robin. A choice between either identity. Thus, he is now Batman "Forever." Clever!

"Okay," you say, "they explored Bruce well. What else you got?" Plenty.

Although on the surface, Carrey's Riddler and Jones' Two-Face are overactive, if you really think about the severity of their actions and notice the undertones of menace, they are rather top-notch. Which is not to claim every moment of theirs is brilliant, but hey; Pobody's Nerfect. Of particular note is Carrey's Nygma, pre-Riddler. He manages to be a truly terrifying fanatic; obsessed with Bruce Wayne. Subtly, in the later half of the film at the Nygmatech party, he is trying to be an exact copy of Bruce out of jealousy. A brilliant touch that I hadn't noticed until much later. Let's face it, if you encountered Jim Carrey's Riddler in reality, you'd be terrified. The guy is downright psychotic. So too is Two-Face.



Above: Jim Carrey as The Riddler.
Left: Val Kilmer in the 'Sonar Batsuit' seen near the end of *Batman Forever* and Chris O'Donnell as Robin.

Tommy Lee Jones
as Two-Face.



Two-Face's first scene is truly menacing. He's a man of absolute unpredictability; his calm demeanor giving way to the frightening mania underneath. With Tommy Lee Jones, Harvey Dent and Two-Face are two souls in the same casket. His first lines in the film to his captive are the stuff the character is made out of:

TWO-FACE:

"So you're counting on the winged avenger to deliver you from evil, aren't you my friend? Are you a gambling man? Well, what's say we flip for it? One man is born a hero, his brother a coward. Babies starve, politicians grow fat, holy men are martyred and junkies grow legion. Why? LUCK! Blind, stupid, simple, clueless luck! A random toss: the only true justice. Let's see what justice has in store for you!"

Even though he becomes rather loud and overbearing later on, there's a constant undercurrent of manic intensity. Again: in reality, this guy would have you scared stiff. Both performances are as true to the comic book as it gets. The Riddler's mania has been a staple since Frank Gorshin, and Two-Face's obsession with dichotomy is spot-on.

So much else shines in the film. Val Kilmer is darkly mysterious and suitably fractured in his psyche. Next to Michael Keaton, he's the best person for the Cape and Cowl. Nicole Kidman is great, aside from some dated pop-psychobabble. Michael Gough is solid as Alfred, as always. The film score is suitably dark when it needs to be. Elliot Goldenthal is no Danny Elfman, but who is? Goldenthal crafts a theme for Batman, that while not heroic or exciting, evokes a dark mood and an undercurrent of tragedy.

Chris O'Donnell brings an excellent sorrow to

Dick Grayson, being another of the film's highlights. The logic in making Robin start off in his late teens was a stroke of brilliance; not only to appeal to the prime target audience at the time, but also because it skirts the questions of Batman's child endangerment. The death of Grayson's family is another highlight. It's beautifully portrayed. And in the same way as the Joker murdering Bruce's parents in the 1989 original, Two-Face brutally murdering Dick's family just because his coin tells him to just makes the package more awful; to think that their lives were worth no more to him than a random coin toss. Deplorable.



The gravity of the film's challenge is also of note. The stakes are a good challenge, and are befitting of the Riddler. His plan to become the smartest man on the planet and ruin everyone's minds in the interest of absolute knowledge is considerably twisted. And his discovery of Bruce's identity and destruction of the Batcave is a shocker; never before has Batman been so completely vulnerable.



The action is exciting; the initial fight between Batman and Two-Face's goons at the beginning of the film

is the closest that Batman film action has ever come to matching the recent smash-hit "Batman: Arkham" video games, with their intense, calculated fighting style. And the effects still hold up without a hitch. Even the much-lambasted production design is like nothing seen anywhere else. And it's definitely a good thing. Owing to the Batman design staple, the city is Gothic and overwhelming; a place of overburdened souls.

Seal's hit song "Kiss from a Rose" covers Chase Meridian's salvation of Bruce's psyche, comparing her love to a "kiss from a rose on the grave" of Bruce's deadened soul.



I could go on and on about how great *Batman Forever* truly is, but I have to leave great things for you to discover on your own. Let's move on to...

Batman & Robin: The Fun One

Remember that I said "Pobody's Nerfect." But perfection isn't necessary. Thankfully, recent years have been kinder to this film. Since the franchise got back-on-track, most people look back at *Batman & Robin* and laugh. And why shouldn't we? Most of it was intended to be funny. That's right. You didn't think Arnold's ice puns were meant to be serious, did you?

Let's be honest: there's an inherent absurdity to Batman. I firmly believe that the more overtly serious or realistic you try to make Batman, the more you expose its silliness. Think about it. He's a guy in a bat costume fighting crime and ridiculously themed villains, and this

Bat-Man somehow scares criminals (no real crook would ever fear a guy in a bat costume, I'm sorry) and doesn't get caught. And he seemingly can do anything. When we embrace that Batman may not be the most believable concept, we thus can expand our mind not to shun a bold or fantastical idea. That's what comic books are all about, folks.



The emotional core of *Batman & Robin* is the importance of family. How's that for a curve-ball, eh? Mr. Freeze is trying to save his wife. Bruce is trying to save his surrogate father Alfred, while Dick is trying to find the acceptance of *his* surrogate father, Bruce. Barbara is trying to save her Uncle Alfred's dignity, and Poison Ivy's loyalty is to no human but instead her "babies," her plants.

Not every aspect of the film is defensible, but there's nothing that's really that infuriating aside from the random butt-shots when the heroes suit-up (more comedy, I suppose). The plot with Alfred dying, and his scenes with Bruce in particular are some of the best scenes of any Batman film. Again, people who only notice that the film has "Nipples, Neon and Nincompoopery" were too busy hating to slow down and notice the film had more going on than its madcap antics.

George Clooney is greatly underrated for what he brings to this film. As Batman, he can be a bit blasé, but Bruce Wayne is where he really shines. And even as Batman, his protective relationship over the headstrong Robin is excellently fleshed-out. He's no-nonsense with his sidekick, but not to denigrate him; he worries for him; but as Alfred says to him: "You must learn to trust him, for that is the nature of family."

The film is fascinating in the fact that it actually evolves Batman further. As a result of his newfound inner-peace in *Forever*, Bruce is no longer morose. As in the Batman comics of the 1970s and early 1980s, Bruce continues his fight because it is his duty, but he has made peace with the loss of his parents and is able to function correctly as a human being. This is an excellent maturing of the character, and evolution of this sort should always be welcomed.

That, my friends, is some heavy stuff. It's not many comic book films that are bold enough to explore the character's weaknesses, much less have the hero himself come to realize them. Recalling this chat, later on in the film as Alfred lay dying, Bruce visits him for what will be the last time, before he steps out to handle his dual responsibilities. At this point in the film, Alfred will surely be dead by the time he returns.



**George Clooney
as Batman.**

The film even bravely points out the inherent futility of Batman's agenda. During a moment in which Bruce feels uneasy due to his bickering with Robin, he converses with Alfred:

BRUCE

"Alfred, am I pig-headed? Is it always 'my way or the highway?'"

ALFRED

"Yes, actually. Death and chance stole your parents. But rather than become a victim, you have done everything in your power to control the fates. For what is Batman if not an effort to master the chaos that sweeps our world? An attempt to control death itself."

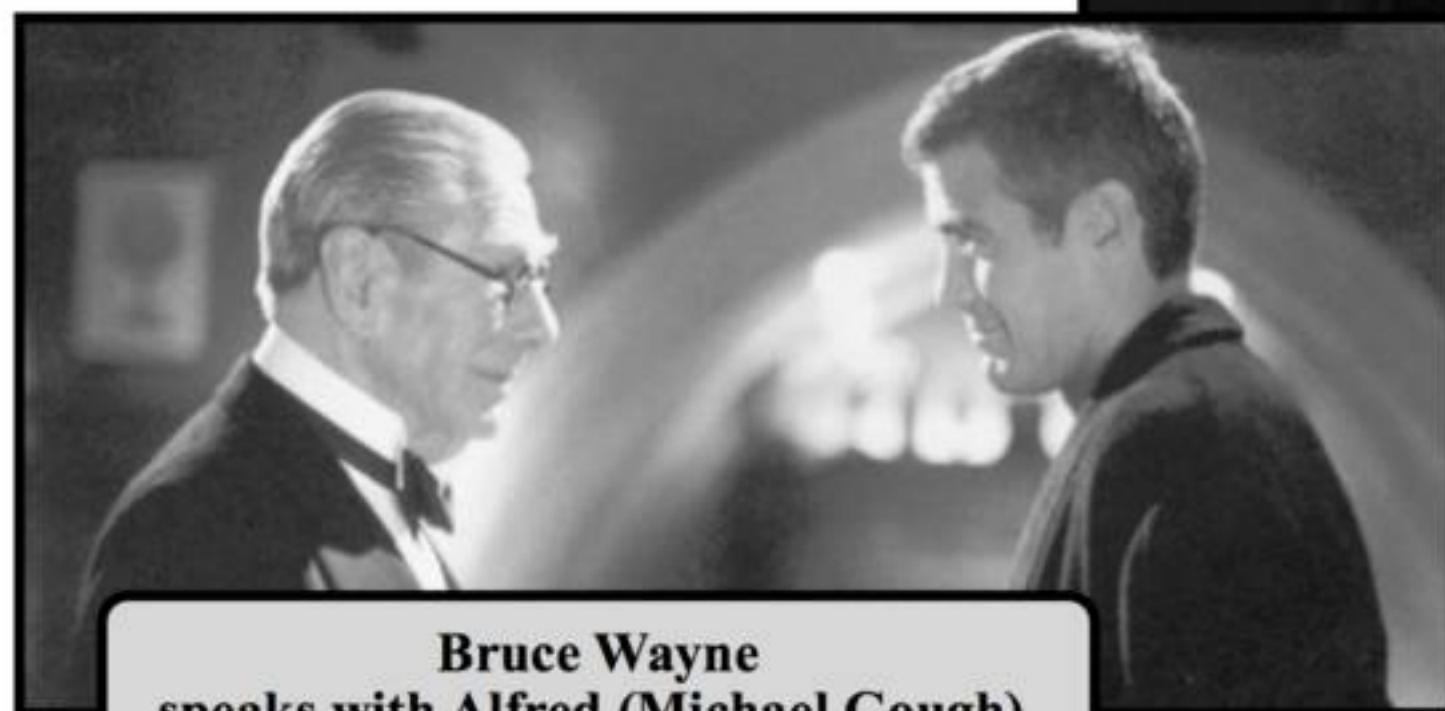
Bruce looks away to the window and recalls putting flowers at his parents' gravestone.

BRUCE

"But I can't, can I?"

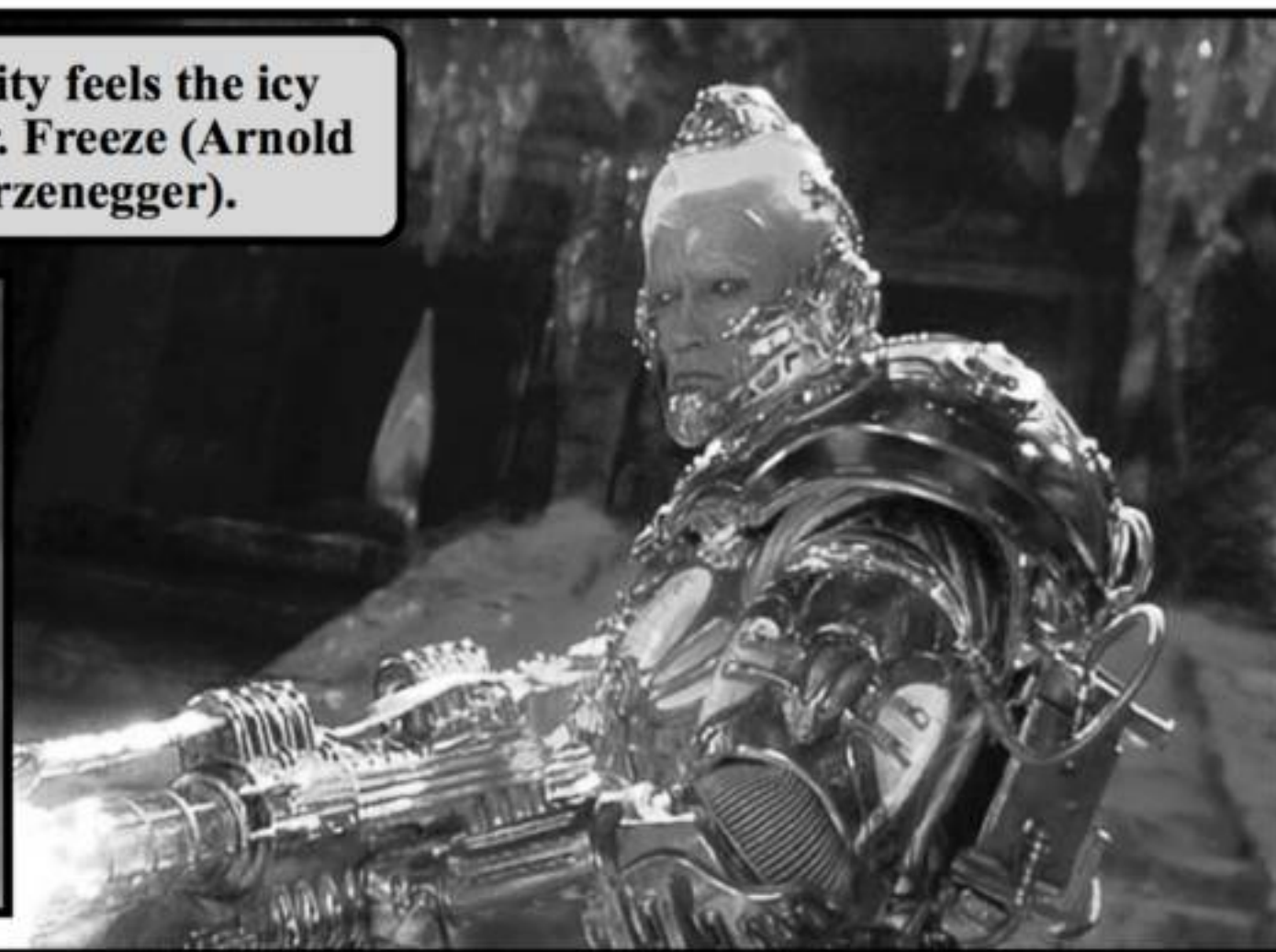
ALFRED

"None of us can."



**Bruce Wayne
speaks with Alfred (Michael Gough).**

**Gotham City feels the icy
wrath of Mr. Freeze (Arnold
Schwarzenegger).**



BRUCE

"I spent my entire life trying to beat back death. Everything I've done, everything I'm capable of doing... but I can't save you."

ALFRED

"There is no defeat in death, Master Bruce. Victory comes in defending what we know is right while we still live."

BRUCE

"I love you, old man."

Holding back tears, Bruce moves in and gives Alfred a kiss goodbye. It's a truly crushing scene, performed brilliantly by both Clooney and Michael Gough. This film best explores the relationship with Bruce and Alfred, even farther than many of the comic's storylines have done.

And when you keep this in mind, the film from then on has an additional layer: Bruce has to go out and fight to save the city from becoming an icy graveyard while his second father lies at home, dying. And Bruce can't be at his side. Heavy stuff indeed.

"All right, already!" You cry. "Family! This film's deeper than I thought. Anything else?"

Poison Ivy is spot-on, right down to her costume. Arnold Schwarzenegger's Mr. Freeze is a delight. In his serious moments, he is actually rather good; but when he's supposed to be funny, oh man, Arnold goes whole instead of going home. Ice puns are nothing new to the character. Even the beloved *Animated Series* episode "Heart of Ice" features cold puns. While the film may overdo them, the fact remains that they are a staple of the character. His make-up and costume, also, are to be revered. Arnold looks spectacular! Also, Dick's quandaries with Bruce are lifted right out of the comic books.

**Pretty
Poison:
Batman's
toxic foe,
Poison Ivy
(Uma
Thurman).**



While Alicia Silverstone's useless Batgirl is undefendable, Bane is craptacular! Don't get me wrong; he's poorly translated from the books (almost the polar opposite), but at least his moronic behavior is comedy gold. And he resembles the character, to-boot. Take that, Tom Hardy!

There's so much more to cover, but as I said, I have to leave you some things to discover. Concluding, it's like this: should the films have been more overtly serious without any comedic overtones? Absolutely. But are they devoid of any merit, artistic or adaptation-wise? Not at all. Whereas the 1960s Batman television series was campy and without any depth, Schumacher's films are not that. They contain humor, but they themselves are not comedies. People these days seem unable to distinguish humor from camp. Particularly in the wake of Christopher Nolan's overbearingly drab Batman series, people have forgotten that the comic book character (even today) still deals with larger-than-life situations and fights against an array of colorful, unreal enemies. Ever since the Joker burst onto the scene in 1940, Batman has been a romanticized, adventurous crusader in outrageous situations. Outrageous, larger-than-life things are not inherently "silly," like many Batman fans now perceive. And even if they were, would they be any sillier than the premise of Batman to begin with?



**Alicia
Silverstone
as Batgirl.**

Do yourself a favor. Sit down with Schumacher's two movies and a bucket of popcorn. Leave your cynicism checked at the door, and really, truly watch them. Pay attention to the performances, the nuance, and the plot. A Batman film doesn't have to be watered-down to be great, nor does it have to have lengthy exposition to actually be deep.



**The indomitable Bane (played
by the late professional wrestler, Jeep Swenson).**



The Bat-Family.

If you can ignore your desire to obsess on the Nipples and the Neon, you'll find two adventures worthy of the Batman title. They may not be perfect, but in a perfect world, Bruce Wayne would have been a happy, well-adjusted guy.

And where would the fun be in that?

INTERVIEW WITH STEVE ENGLEHART

THE MAN WHO WROTE THE DEFINITIVE BAT

Comics, novels, children's books, video game design, television, animation...these are only but a few of the varied realms that Steve Englehart has managed to leave his indelible mark. Having written for many of Marvel and DC's top titles, Mr. Englehart's work has since become a benchmark in the medium. One of his many notable gifts to the craft continues to be lauded as a masterwork of comic book storytelling. We're talking about the eight-issue Batman story arc in *Detective Comics* #469-476, a plot line that forever changed how readers would see the Dark Knight and one that subsequently led to the 1989 big-screen revitalization of the character.



1. How did writing for Batman come about, starting with your work on *Detective Comics* #469 in 1977?

STEVE ENGLEHART: I was hired by DC to revamp all of their hero characters in the JLA. I agreed happily, but said I wanted to write Batman in his own series as well. He'd been a favorite of mine since I was a kid.

2. Your work on *Detective Comics* #469 – #476 has been considered by many to be the definitive Batman. You infused the stories with a darker edge, an adult atmosphere, and permeated them with pulp sensibilities. At the time, was DC trying to push for an edgier feel? How much free reign were you given while working on *Detective*?

SE: DC was just pushing for anything that would sell their comics. The approach was all mine – all the things I thought should be in the Batman and weren't. I was given completely free rein.

3. Your run on *Detective Comics* featured regulars from Batman's rogues gallery, like the Penguin and the Joker – but you brought back some very obscure villains from the Dark Knight's past as well. For example, Hugo Strange had last appeared in *Detective Comics* #46 (1940) and Deadshot was previously featured in *Batman* #59 back in the '50s; what was it about these characters that made you choose to revive them in 1977?

SE: I really wanted to get that pulp darkness back in the book, so I asked DC for copies of the earliest Bat issues – something no one had ever done before, apparently. (It probably sparked the whole ARCHIVE and MASTERWORKS idea.) Anyway, I read those early stories and found Hugo Strange and his monsters; then I reimagined him to my new mix. As for Deadshot – I was originally going to do seven issues, but an eighth opened up. I had plenty I could do with the ongoing storyline,

opening up some characters, but I had no villain right to hand. Editor Julie Schwartz suggested DS, who was not very interesting to me in his original (circa 1955) appearance, but Marshall Rogers did a great costume revamp and we went from there.



Above Left: Deadshot as he originally appeared in *Batman* #59. Above Right: Marshall Rogers' redesign. Below: The return of Hugo Strange.



4. While female characters like Vicki Vale had previously been used in the earlier Batman comics, and perhaps provided some remote semblance of 'romantic connection' with Bruce Wayne, most writers left them devoid of any real emotional involvement with the Caped Crusader. You changed that. Could you tell us about your decision to introduce Silver St. Cloud, Batman's first 'real' love interest?

SE: I had always been bugged that comics men had the emotional nature of 12-year-olds; there were no adult relationships in these "kids' stories," which is what comics were at the time. I had done adults within the limits of comics at the time (Steve Rogers and Sharon, Vision and the Scarlet Witch, etc.), but we never got anywhere near actual sex. But if there's one grown man in comics, it seemed like it ought to be the Batman, and therefore, I needed to add the missing element. It was still beneath the Comics Code, of course, so all I could do was allude to an off-camera situation, but I don't think anyone misunderstood what I was talking about. It made Batman much more realistic, which – more than the pulp or the Joker or any of that – made him accessible to a mass audience. That's what got the film franchise made.

On a purely Bat-level, it showed us the man behind the Cape and Cowl. Since I simultaneously added the

edge to the costumed persona, it really sharpened the picture of Bruce Wayne's night job, drawing us into the danger a real man was facing.

5. Why was there such a long span between your 8-issue run on *Detective Comics* in the late '70s and your sequel, *Dark Detective*, in 2005?

SE: DC didn't want to give Marshall, Terry Austin, and me credit for regenerating the franchise. They never give any of their creators credit for their work.

6. In 1986 Warner Brothers brought you in to write a treatment for a live-action Batman film, which would later go on to be directed by Tim Burton in 1989. Could you tell us a little about your treatment and how it differed from what finally appeared on screen? Was there anything specific (characters, situations, etc) that Warner Brothers requested to be in the treatment?

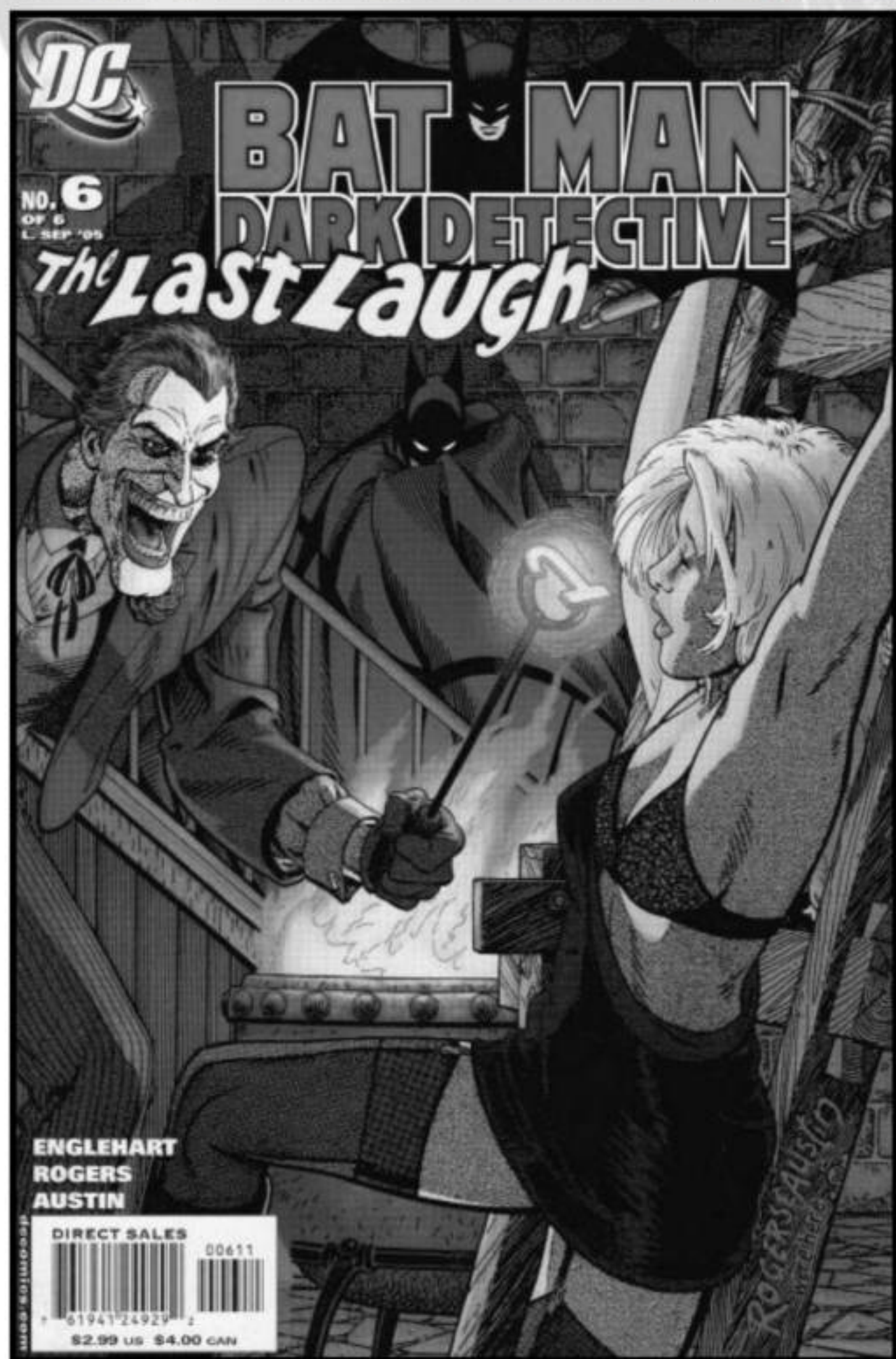
SE: When I came in, they'd been trying for ten years to adapt my stories and not being happy with the results. So after ten years, they finally broke down and asked me to help. At the time, Robin and the Penguin were both supposed to be in the film, in addition to the Joker, and I had to (a) do what I knew to be right for the Batman, with (b) too many characters to really do it right, while (c) telling them repeatedly to hold Robin and Penguin for later. And they (a) listened because I was the expert, and (b) didn't listen because they didn't want to give me any credit. It was an interesting time. But in the end, Penguin and Robin were out.

I should add that I was not working for Warners. I was working for DC, which, as I later learned, was illegal under Writers Guild rules. It allowed them to pay me much less than the Guild mandated and deny me a credit.

7. Your work on *Detective Comics* has been reprinted numerous times and frequently adapted in one form or another. The '90s *Batman: The Animated Series* episode, "The Strange Secret of Bruce Wayne" was an adaptation from your Hugo Strange stories "The Dead Yet Live" and "I Am the Batman." Also, "The Laughing Fish" was adapted into a *Batman: The Animated Series* episode of the same name. Even crime boss, Rupert Thorne – who you had initially introduced in *Detective Comics* #469 – became a recurring villain in the series. Were you ever asked for your input with the show, or asked to write for any of the episodes? Do you feel that the animated adaptations did your original stories justice?

SE: I was never asked to be involved. See question 5 for why. But Paul Dini was a fan and made sure the adaptations were good, so I feel pretty satisfied with them.

8. Anyone familiar with 2005's *Dark Detective* will instantly find *many* parallels between Christopher



Left: *Batman: Dark Detective* #6 featuring Silver St. Cloud in peril at the hands of the Joker.

Nolan's film, *The Dark Knight* and your work. Both feature a love interest in mortal danger (peril caused by the Joker, no less), the backdrop of an election with an uncorrupted politician, and appearances by the Scarecrow and Two-Face! In *Dark Detective #1* the Joker crashes a political fundraiser, closely mirroring a scene replicated in *The Dark Knight*. And that's only the beginning, the similarities are truly staggering. What are your thoughts on *The Dark Knight* using many of your earlier concepts?

SE: I liked the movie a lot, but I wish I were being treated fairly, with some credit and some money. And not just me, but Marshall's son and Terry Austin.

9. Frank Miller is often credited with taking Batman into a bleak, grim and gritty realm that adults could read and appreciate. However, your run on *Detective Comics* predates Miller's *Dark Knight Returns* by nearly a decade and was the first example of an adult-oriented Batman, along with forging some of the most enduring influences on the character's continuing mythology. Have you ever read any of Miller's Batman work? If so, what are your thoughts on the direction he took the character?

SE: Of course I've read Frank. I liked his stuff a lot, even though his character and mine are very different. Every writer should have the chance to do his own take, so I have no problem whatsoever with what he did.

10. Overall, from 1989 to the present, what do you think of the live-action Batman films? Do you feel that any of them really captured the ambiance of the character?

SE: I thought the first one caught it, since it was based directly on my run and I had a hand in getting it done. After that, the films got progressively worse, until Chris Nolan put new energy into them. His Batman is a little robotic, in my opinion, but certainly has all the

accoutrements going strong, as you mentioned in question 8. The version I find most interesting right now is his brother's, in *Person of Interest* – no costume, but a very recognizable Batman.

11. You have a number of Batman stories that have, sadly, gone unpublished. Out of these, do you have a favorite?

SE: By far, my favorite is the 2-part Mad Hatter story,

"Top Hat and Nails." I'm VERY happy with what went on in there.

12. You've written for some of the most popular comic book titles in the history of the medium, including *The Avengers*, *Captain America*, *Dr. Strange*, *Fantastic Four*, *The Incredible Hulk*, *Silver Surfer*, *Green Lantern*, *The Justice League of America*, *Vampirella*, and *The Night Man*, among many others. Do you have a favorite title you've written for?

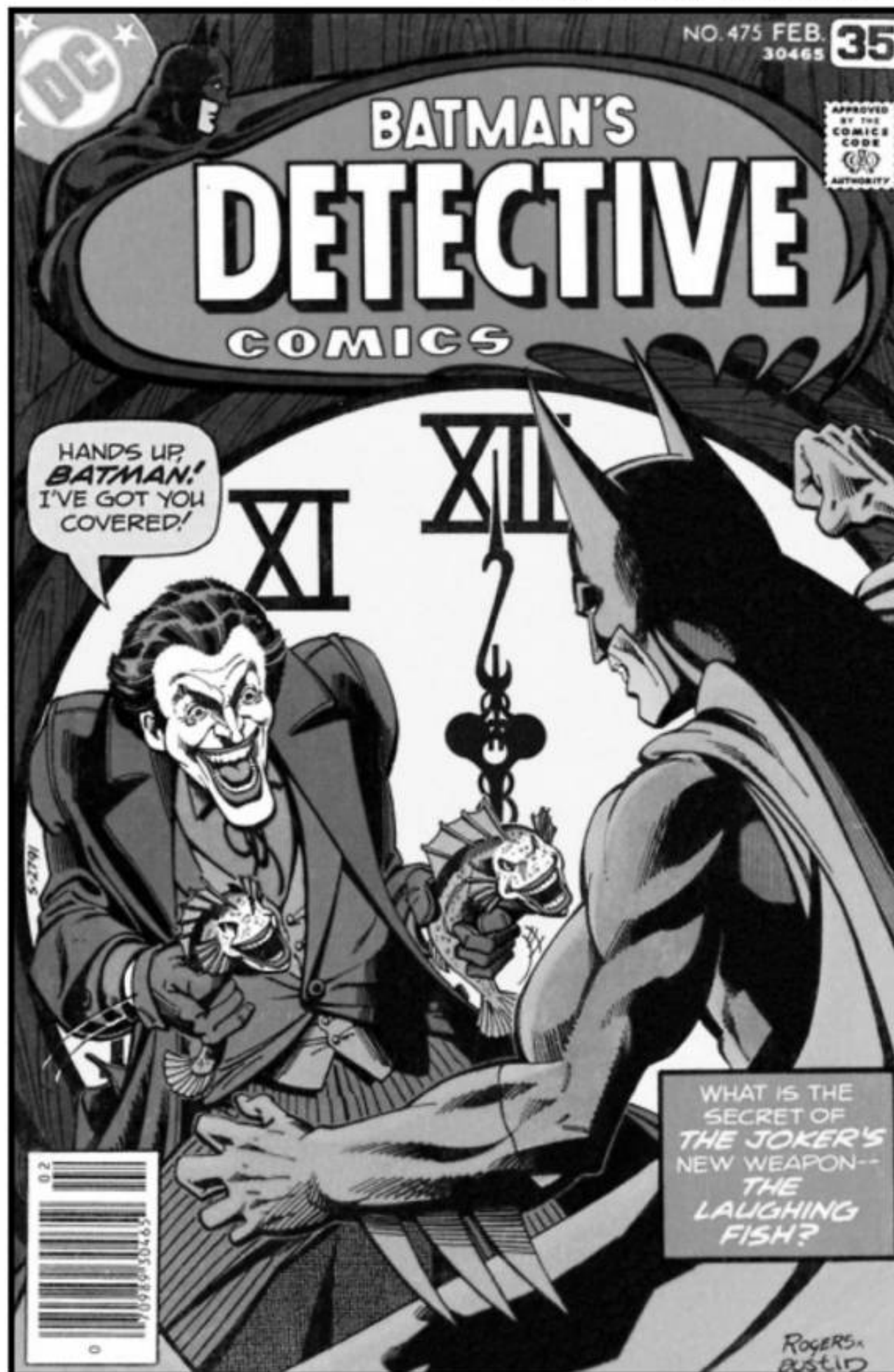
SE: Not really. I tried to make each one my favorite in the moment, so I honestly don't have one, or even five, that I like better than the rest.

13. Are you currently working on any projects that you would like to share with our readers?

SE: I'm writing a series of novels that Tor is publishing, about a guy named Max August who's sort of a combination of the Batman, Captain America, and Doctor

Strange, in that he's a normal guy who learned wizardry and uses it to fight the guys trying to rule America from behind the scenes. It's cosmic, political (pro 99%), and international action – everything I like. There are two out already, *The Long Man* and *The Plain Man* – and the third one, *The Arena Man*, will be out in 2012.

Shadowland Magazine would like to thank Mr. Englehart for taking the time to speak with us. You can keep up-to-date with his current work by visiting his website: www.steveenglehart.com



SHADOWMAIL



LETTERS - LETTERS - LETTERS - LETTERS - LETTERS - LETTERS

GUYVER SURVIVOR

I have to share this one tidbit with you. I have 2 boys (now 29 & 22), who are both Horror/Sci-Fi buffs, so we all love the same movies. My youngest, however, had a somewhat weak stomach in his early years.

I remember renting *The Guyver* back in '93 or '94. There's a scene when the Guyver transformation takes place & these tendrils came out of the back of a guy's neck & went into his mouth before the robotic suit covered him. At the sight of that, my youngest son started gagging and we barely dragged a trash can in front of him before he spewed!! Despite that faux pas, he still wanted to see the rest of the movie (I think he was about 6 years old at the time). We laughed like hell & still tease him about it, but he puts up with it good-naturedly. He's a real gore-hound now.

Anyway, I'm looking forward to your new issue. Glad to hear that *Shadowland* is a success!

Best Regards,
Tom Shumaker

KEEPING AN EYE OUT FOR THE BLIND DEAD

Way to go on a very grand second issue. *The Guyver* article brought back some great memories. I simply love the diversity in *Shadowland*. Few magazines have such a range of genres and topics, so you won me over as a returning reader.

Now, onto the *Tombs of the Blind Dead* article from your last issue. Believe it or not, I never knew there were four movies in the series! For years I had the Anchor Bay double feature release that came out on DVD. I really liked the films a lot but never sought out the director or assumed others were out there.

The pictures and old ads in the *Knights of Terror* article were a delight and I want to thank your magazine and the author of the article for opening my eyes to more *Blind Dead* films and their director.

By the way, love your magazine's covers so far. They are fit to be framed!

Keep those issues coming,
Aaron Levinson

FULL CIRCLE...OF FEAR

Great job on the second ish guys. Brilliant work all around. *The William Castle* and *Blind Dead* articles were tremendously fun to read through. The William Castle *Ghost Story* piece brought back some fond memories. I recall catching a few episodes of *Circle of Fear* way back when, but never seen the show in its previous form with Sebastian Cabot hosting. Years ago I tried to dig up information on *Circle of Fear* episodes but at the time, for whatever reason, I thought the show had been called "Sphere of Fear."

Best,
Richard Kassir

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BATS OUT OF HELL

A GUIDE TO KILLER BAT
FILMS

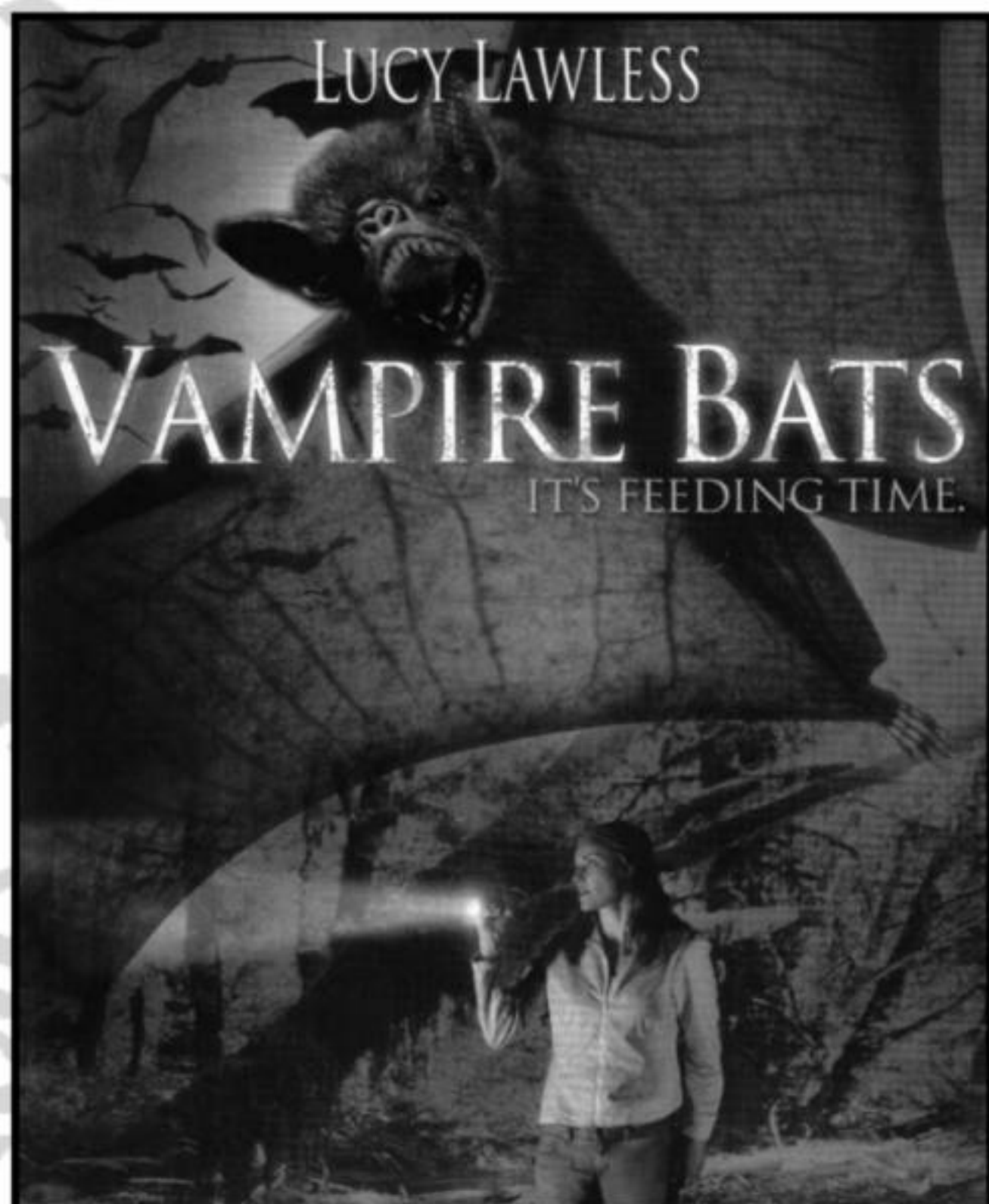
By Kevin "Dead Kev" Sproles

The horror genre has managed to villanize pretty much every animal or bit of nature at some time or another. It's easy to do that with animals like alligators (*Alligator*) or snakes (*Anaconda*). Though, it takes a little more creativity to villanize less-threatening creatures like rabbits (*Night of the Lepus*) or worms (*Squirm*). But they've managed to.

Bats fall into the former category. They're easy targets because of their creepy appearance, annoying squeaking and their historical connection to Dracula and vampires. Bats may not be as popular movie fodder as spiders or sharks, but they naturally invoke enough fear to have inspired several movies. If you're looking for your killer bat fix, look no further than this spoiler-free worst-to-first list.

VAMPIRE BATS (2005)

"Something has changed them."



Isn't it enough that she saved the country from killer locusts? Now she has to fight off killer vampire bats?

After saving the country in the creature flick *Locusts* – also a fitting title – Lucy Lawless reprises her character Dr. Maddy Rierdon in an effort to once again save the day from Mother Nature's wrath.

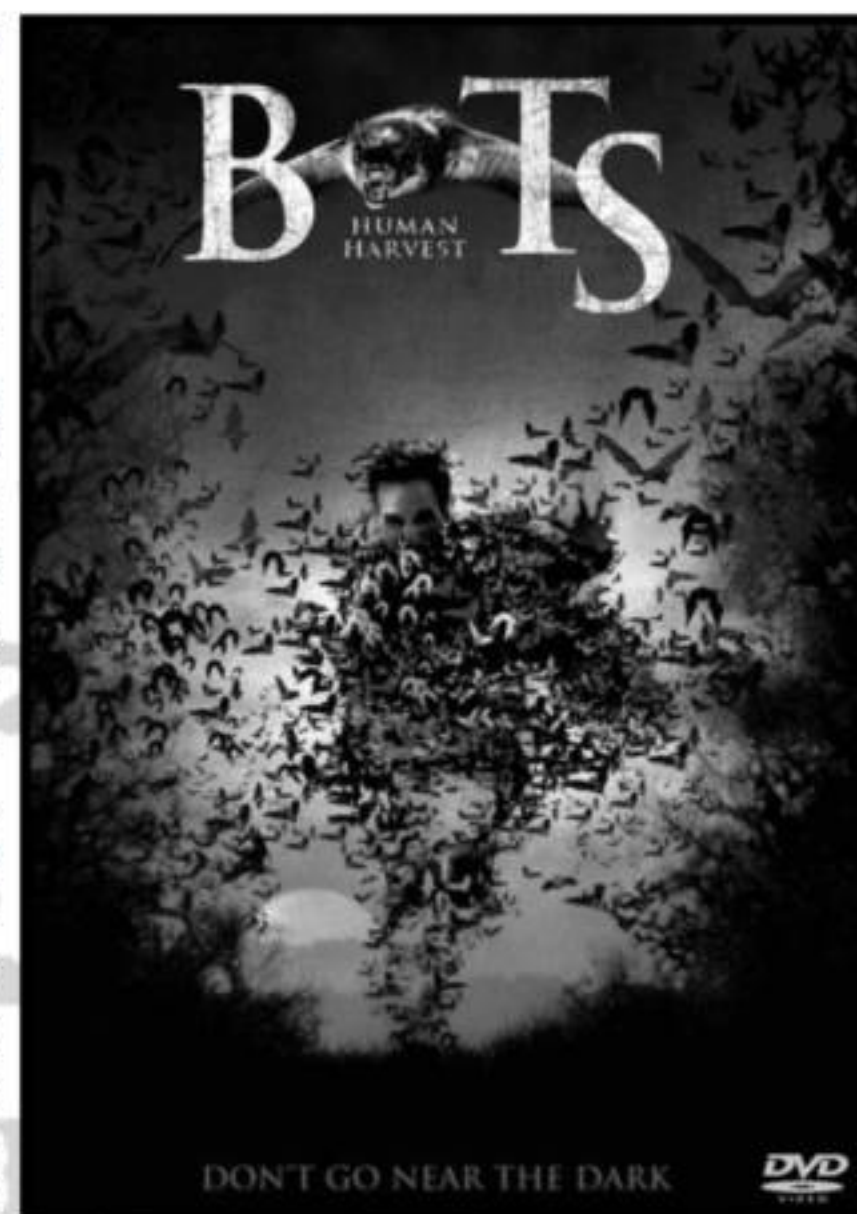
Dr. Rierdon no longer works for the U.S. Department of Agriculture. She has moved to Mercier, Louisiana for a quieter life as a biology professor at Tate University. So it's quite the bout of bad luck that she finds herself knee-deep in another nature-gone-bad scenario. At least this time it's not because of some evil scientist. But what is behind these bat attacks? And why do they have an extra set of fangs?

Lawless does a fine job, but the whole movie is just one big wet noodle. It's not so much bad as it's just completely uninteresting. It's utterly devoid of scares, humor, interesting characters, or anything compelling enough to warrant keeping your eyeballs on the screen.

BATS: HUMAN HARVEST (2007)

"Bats bounce off me."

Someone hit the sauce a little too heavily. That person then proceeded to green light the straight-to-television embarrassment known as *Bats: Human Harvest*. It is a sequel in name only to the 1999 theatrically-released *Bats*, starring Lou Diamond Phillips. It bears no resemblance to the original, has none of the same actors, no attachment to the previous story, and even the bats are a bit different.



In this sequel, a small American special forces unit (plus one Russian CIA agent) is sent into the notorious Belzan forest in Chechnya in search of a rogue scientist, Dr. Benton Walsh. In their pursuit, these elite soldiers must fight their way through Chechen rebels, Russian spetsnaz

and a bunch of genetically-altered vampire bats. Of course, it's not spoiling anything to say that these flesh-eating bats are the creation of the good doctor.

The original movie didn't fare well at the box office, but obviously garnered enough name recognition that a sequel sounded like a good idea. Well it wasn't. They traded C-lister Lou Diamond Phillips for D-lister David Chokachi. Phillip's character in the first film may have been a walking cliché, but Chokachi's lone wolf character Russo is a walking parody of itself.

Producers tried to add more elaborate set pieces, more gunfighting, some unconvincing CGI choppers, and a few more explosions. A really ambitious script is usually a good thing...unless you're working on a SyFy channel budget.

THE DEVIL BAT (1940)

"Now rub it on the tender part of your neck."



The Devil Bat (aka *Killer Bats*) is over 70 years old, so it's hard to give it much grief. This is one of the numerous Poverty Row features Bela Lugosi took part in. It's really unfortunate because it's obvious that Lugosi was capable of so much more. He really is the only thing interesting in *The Devil Bat*. He plays the part of a demented Dr. Carruthers, who is well-liked in his village of

Heathville, but secretly plans to take out his career frustrations upon his employers. He feels they've gotten rich on the back of his work.

To implement his plan, he enlists the aid of vampire bats...with a little enhancement. And since DNA manipulation didn't exist at the time, kindly Dr. Carruthers resorts to "glandular stimulation" via electricity. That makes the bats much larger. But how does he get them to attack his enemies? His new after shave formula, of course. He dupes his targets into splashing a little about their neck and face and – presto! – severed jugular vein a few minutes later.

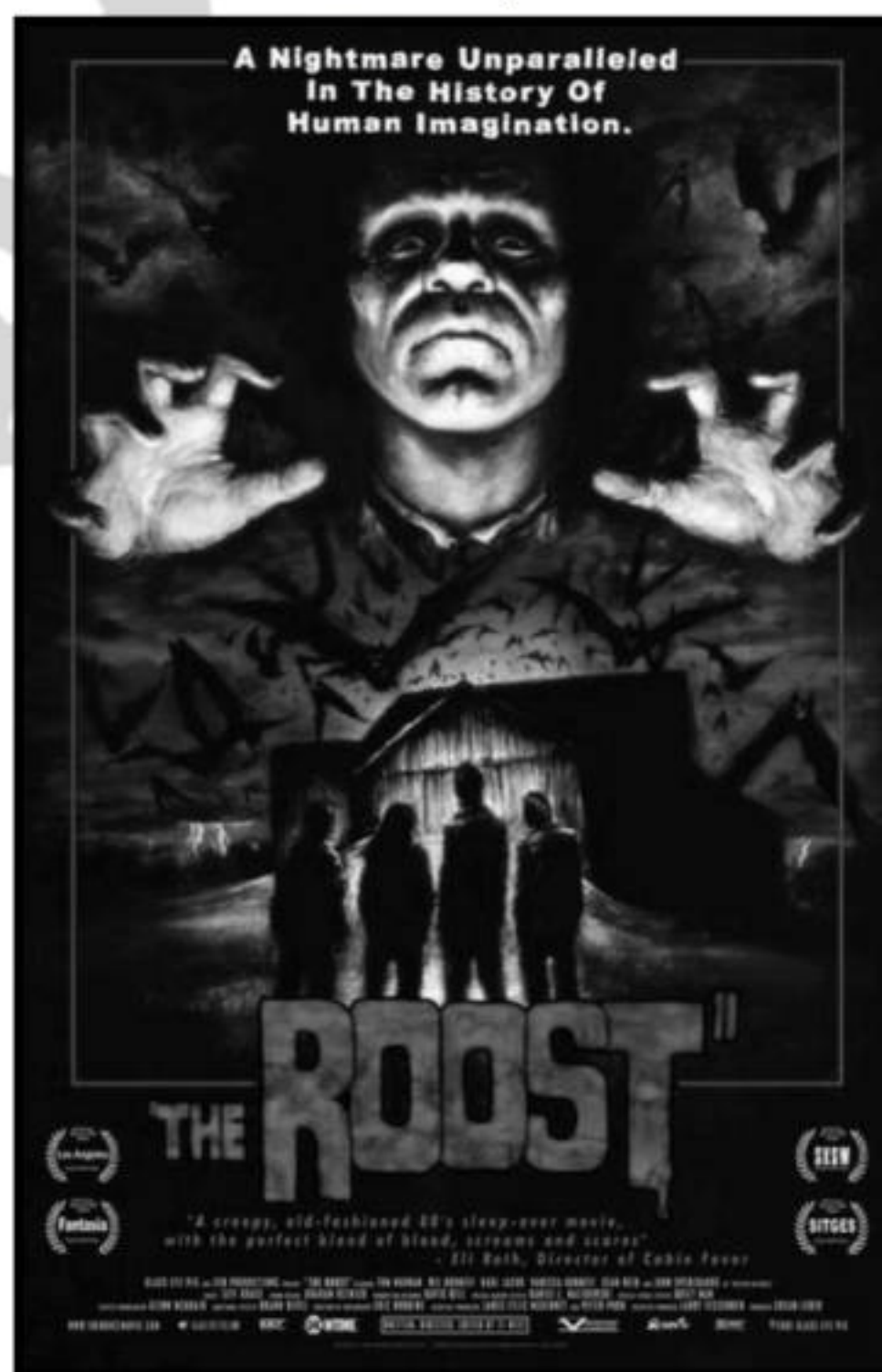
There is no mystery in this film. You know exactly whodunit after reading a textual forward that appears after the opening credits. The rest of the film is just observing the deranged scheme unfold. The fun part is watching the obviously fake bat swoop down and attack people. Even more fun is listening to the high-pitched monkey-having-intercourse scream it emits. You've got a stone heart if you can't get a laugh out of it.

THE ROOST (2005)

"All we have to do is make it to his car."

Mix zombies and killer bats and you get *The Roost*. These bats aren't satisfied with just killing people. They turn them into the walking dead afterwards! So not only do you have to worry about getting chomped on by these flying rodents, you have to worry about your buddies getting eaten and turning against you too.

The Roost plays like a Saturday night creature feature, even being introduced by a host (Tom Noonan) à la Elvira or Svengoolie. The host even pops up in the middle of the film itself. This particular addition is either hated because of the interruption or loved because enhances that



B-movie feel.

This is the only killer bat movie that actually makes a legitimate attempt to scare the audience. And director Ti West succeeds in getting viewers to jump by ratcheting up the tension and manipulating a surprisingly good score. He's a young director who obviously loves the genre. Watch for him in the future.

The Roost is unique, and has some passion put into it. If

it weren't for the incredibly slow start to the film and it being plagued by some of the most egregious audio problems I've ever witnessed in a movie, *The Roost* would be much more highly regarded than it is.

BATS (1999)

"Bats do not kill people. Period."



If you're wondering why there aren't more killer bat movies coming to theaters...look no further than *Bats* for your answer. When it was released during the Halloween season in 1999, it opened at the #7 spot on the box office charts and ended up leaving theaters grossing just over \$10 million in ticket sales. Considering it cost almost \$40 million to produce, it's not a surprise that Hollywood didn't come flocking for more bat movies.

You can't blame low ticket sales on audiences not knowing what the movie was about. The title pretty much lays it out there. You know what you're getting into. It's a movie about bats. Specifically, about two genetically enhanced bats that escape and end up terrorizing a small Texas town. They're intelligence has been increased and they have been made omnivorous so that they can feed in any environment. They are also able to infect regular bats, thus able to increase their numbers considerably.

Lou Diamond Phillips (*Young Guns*) is the cigar-chomping, opera-loving Sheriff Kimsey who won't back down from a fight. Dina Meyer (*Starship Troopers*) is Dr. Sheila Casper, a wildlife zoologist specializing in chiroptera. Together they wage war against the bloodsuckers in what amounts to a fairly middling 90 minutes.

Despite it having a coherent storyline, *Bats* does occasionally degrade into silliness. This is most evident when the bats pull a spark plug loose in one scene. Also, the obligatory "bats attack town center" scene is slightly cringe-inducing. From the generic cars running into telephone poles (and each other) to the no-name citizens falling through store windows, you've seen it in a million other movies.

FANGS (2002)

"It was like Pearl Harbor with music."

Fangs takes the path less traveled for a made-for-TV movie about killer bats. It doesn't take itself too seriously and plays for laughs more than it does scares. Cast the imminently watchable Corbin Bernsen as a ruthless real estate mogul, and you've got yourself a guilty pleasure.

Professor Arthur Fuller (Mark Taylor) is experimenting with bats. When his bats escape and subsequently kill him, the general public is put in danger. Victims pop up on a daily basis. Are they being targeted? If so, by whom? It's up to a police detective Ally Parks (Tracy Nelson) and veterinarian Dr. John Winslow (Whip Hubley) to find the bats and destroy them before they can ruin the Apple Blossom Dance.

Yeah, the story is a bit hokey. And the characters are goofy. Sure the ending is a little Scooby-Doo-ish. Lighten up. It's all in good fun.

NIGHTWING (1979)

"One man's superstition is another man's religion."

To describe *Nightwing* as action-packed would be a lie. However, good story trumps mindless action any day. Add skilled performances by Nick Mancuso (*Under Siege*), David Warner (*Black Death*), and Stephen Macht (*The Monster Squad*) and you've got a slick little production. Not to mention, the title is much more creative than others of its ilk.

Nightwing is a pretty faithful adaptation of the novel of the same name, written by Martin Cruz Smith. Youngman Duran (Mancuso) is the only law on a New Mexico Indian reservation. He begins by investigating a horse mutilation and ends up fighting against superstitions, a greedy rival, and a ton of vampire bats. His uncle Abner is a high priest who actively practices "magic." Are his ramblings coming true? Can Youngman and bat-hunter Phillip Payne (Warner) rid the reservation of the threat before it's too late? It's only in the last few spoken lines of the movie that all will become clear.



NIGHTWING

In the dead of night they come

Swift
Silent
Savage



COLUMBIA PICTURES PRESENTS
A MARTIN RANSOHOFF PRODUCTION
starring AN ARTHUR HILLER FILM • "NIGHTWING"
NICK MANCUSO • DAVID WARNER • KATHRYN HARROLD
STEPHEN MACHT • STROTHER MARTIN
Screenplay by STEVE SHAGAN • BUD SHRAKE and MARTIN CRUZ SMITH
Based upon the novel by MARTIN CRUZ SMITH
Executive Producer RICHARD ST. JOHNS • Produced by MARTIN RANSOHOFF
Directed by ARTHUR HILLER • Music by HENRY MANCINI

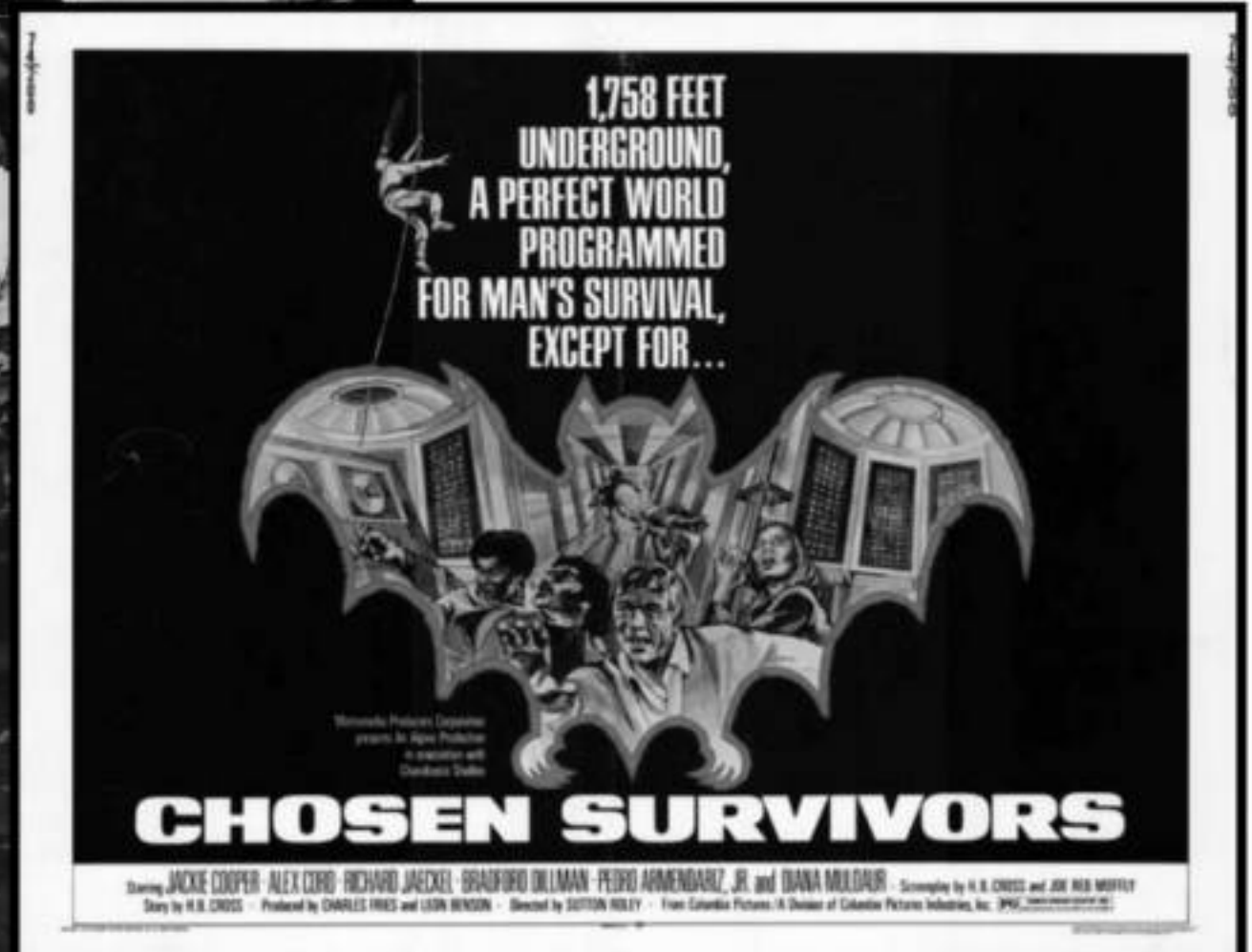
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and these survivors have been computer-selected to repopulate the earth once radiation levels have fallen to acceptable levels. The only problem is that they have some hungry neighbors.

Honestly, the bats aren't the most interesting part of the movie. Instead, it's the questions that the movie poses while watching. Would you want to live knowing that everyone else was dead and everything you ever knew was gone? Would such a group of survivors turn on each other or work together for a better future? How long would it take someone to crack under pressure or from the claustrophobic conditions?

Without a doubt, this film has the most thought-provoking plot and interesting characters of any of the "killer bat" movies. If there's only one to watch, this is it.



CHOSEN SURVIVORS (1974)

"It is not the intention of scientists or the government to be cruel."

Chosen Survivors is a late seventies gem that's half animal-attack movie and half *Twilight Zone* episode. It is the crème de la crème of bat movies in part because the bats aren't the sole focus. Ten people are pulled from society for their skills and accomplishments and forced into an underground bunker built 1,758 feet below the surface. The nuclear holocaust has finally come to fruition



Above: Promotional images from *Chosen Survivors*.

GYAOS: BAT KAIJU

NOCTURNAL MONSTER FROM THE FAR EAST

By Matt Richards

Some of the largest bats in the world are the 'flying foxes' of Indonesia which have an impressive wingspan of close to 6 feet. Remarkable as that may be, it's nothing compared to the kaiju variety of bat inhabiting Japan, capable of reaching a whopping 623 foot wingspan! A frightening thought, to be sure, considering their main diet consists of humans. Lucky for the Japanese, they also have a gigantic fire-breathing turtle to protect them from such a threat.

First appearing in 1967's *Gamera vs. Gyaos* (the third big-screen outing for Japan's premiere monster-turtle, Gamera), Gyaos reveals itself as a skyscraper-sized nocturnal predator hungry for people-sized snacks and interested in causing widespread property damage. Seeing as there can only be one 300 foot monster patrolling Japan on any given day, Gamera and Gyaos engage in an unfriendly exchange of claw-against-claw. Though weakened by sunlight, Gyaos is no slouch in battle, particularly when it comes to spitting sonic beams from its mouth and emitting yellow-colored smog capable of dousing the super turtle's flame-breath.

Though Gyaos is able to best Gamera in combat during their first two encounters, the winged-terror's luck runs out when they clash a third time. In an effort to trap Gyaos, the army lures it out of hiding with artificial blood. The plan fails, but good ol' Gamera arrives just in time to finish Gyaos off by dragging the creature into the crater of Mt. Fuji.



Gyaos in flight.

The original Showa series of Gamera films, encompassing the eight entries produced between 1965 and 1980, rarely featured an appearance by the same monster twice (aside from gratuitous amounts of stock footage). Gyaos was the exception.

In *Gamera vs. Guiron* (1969) it's revealed that a silver-colored species of Gyaos (referred to as Space Gyaos) inhabits the planet Terra. Though Gamera never confronts them in the film, the blade-headed monster Guiron has several memorable bouts with Terra's winged inhabitants. A little behind-the-scenes trivia reveals that the filmmakers had never intended for Gyaos to return in *Gamera vs. Guiron*, and that a brand new monster was supposed to be used. Though, due to budget constraints,



Promotional poster for *Gamera vs. Gyaos*.

they simply painted the old Gyaos costume silver.

The Showa Gamera series was notorious for reusing stock footage from the previous films but none more so than *Gamera: Super Monster* (1980) which showcased every major battle Gamera had been embroiled in for the past two decades. Gyaos only appears in the footage culled from *Gamera vs. Gyaos*, but it 'officially' marked the monster's third appearance in the series.



Guiron vs. Space Gyaos.

1995 marked a reboot of the Gamera franchise in what would become known as the Heisei series. The first and third film in the trilogy focused heavily on the appearance of multiple Gyaos. *Gamera: Guardian of the Universe* has the title character confront three relatively small (by giant turtle standards) newborn hatchlings. Although able to eliminate two of them, the third evades Gamera's clutches and grows in size, allowing for a spectacular final battle during the film's final act.



making Gyaos the only kaiju aside from Gamera to appear in the franchise's Showa, Heisei, and Millennium outings.

At this time of this writing the future of the Gamera series seems uncertain. 2015 marks Gamera's 50th anniversary and speculation regarding the development of a new film in the franchise is already making the rounds – one such rumor has stated that the film would emulate the monster bash storyline of *Godzilla: Final Wars* (2004), featuring the entire lineup of Gamera's foes. Considering how many times Gyaos has made it onto the screen, it wouldn't be a stretch to imagine that fans of Japan's bat-kaiju will be seeing the creature spread its wings once again.



Gamera 3: Revenge of Iris (1999) reveals that the Gyaos have returned and are growing in number – it doesn't help matters that they've also evolved into the more powerful Hyper Gyaos. *Gamera 3* has one of the all-time best Gamera/Gyaos scenes early in the film when they fight in Tokyo's Shibuya district. Though the bat-like creatures are not Gamera's main adversary in the plot, they play a large role near the film's startling conclusion.

Gamera the Brave (2006) is, so far, the shelled hero's only installment of the new millennium. Discarding the darker tone of the Heisei films, *Gamera the Brave* rebooted the franchise and included a new foe to tangle with. Nevertheless, several Gyaos appear in a flashback –



ALL SHALL LISTEN WHEN... THE BAT WHISPERS

By Frank Warden

CITIZEN BAT

Citizen Kane. Time and again Orson Welles' crowning achievement has held its coveted position at the #1 spot on the American Film Institute's *100 Years, 100 Movies*. Most historians are in agreement, *Citizen Kane* was a revolutionary masterpiece in the medium of film. Ironically, when it was released in 1941, it failed to make an impact at the box office or earn the critical praise it receives today. Even at the 1942 Academy Awards *Citizen Kane* only took home a single Oscar, for Best Original Screenplay – though it was nominated in nearly every other category. Regardless, for a film that is considered to be “the best,” one Oscar seems far from adequate.

For those who are not film scholars, or those unfamiliar with the filmmaking process, it may seem odd that *Citizen Kane* is still held in such high regard – especially today, when advancements in film

production have come so far. Fortunately, the merits of the film can be described in brief: a gripping well-told story aside, *Citizen Kane* was innovative from a technical standpoint. It was the first time deep focus shots were used, wherein the camera would capture action of the foreground, midground, and background in the same



shot. Welles' use of low angles (something rarely done prior to *Kane*, due to having to construct sets with ceilings) gave the film an unprecedented impression of scope and grandeur. Lighting techniques, use of shadows, and fluid camera movement only enhanced the film's story and, further, *Citizen Kane* gave way to the 'L-cut'/'match cut' – forms of continuity film editing that established a coherence between shots.

Today certain standout films continue to be equated with greatness by earning a comparison with *Citizen Kane*. Case in point, *The Wicker Man* (1973) has long been considered to be the “*Citizen Kane* of Horror Movies.” Certainly, *The Wicker Man* is deserving of the praise, though every genre seems to have their *Kane* comparison. However, for all of Welles' mastery of the craft and his impressive work, James Whale's *The Bride of Frankenstein* (1935) could be argued as an earlier testament to a revolutionary filmmaking process. Whale, much like

Welles, employed low angles, ample camera movement, and effective lighting. Though, due to it being a horror picture, the respect *The Bride of Frankenstein* deserves is ever elusive; the irony is that *Bride*, like *Kane*, won only a lone Oscar (Best Sound).

Let's rewind the clock back a bit further. The year is

1930, the silent era of film is all but dead and the new age of “talkies” has proven to even the most skeptical naysayer that sound will become commonplace. However, with the addition of voices, audio effects, and music, filmmakers are now burdened with heavier cameras, extra equipment to record audio, and the once visual focus of the art is now relegated to making sure that the actor’s voice and line delivery are acceptable.

It’s no secret or surprise that many actors were unable to cope with the changeover from silent to sound. The same applied to many directors – though Roland West managed the conversion quite well and proved his ability to direct a successful (and profitable) sound picture in 1929 with the crime drama *Alibi*. Though West’s most well-known work would be a mystery/thriller he helmed the year after, a film about a master criminal with the same name as a certain flying mammal...

As we begin down the long and winding history of West’s film, let it be said that *The Bat Whispers* is a ground-breaking motion picture. *Whispers* set the standard for what was to come not just years – but entire decades later and, in many ways, stands as a milestone that trumps even the ‘gold standard’ of cinema...yes, that means *Citizen Kane*.

A BAT OVER BROADWAY

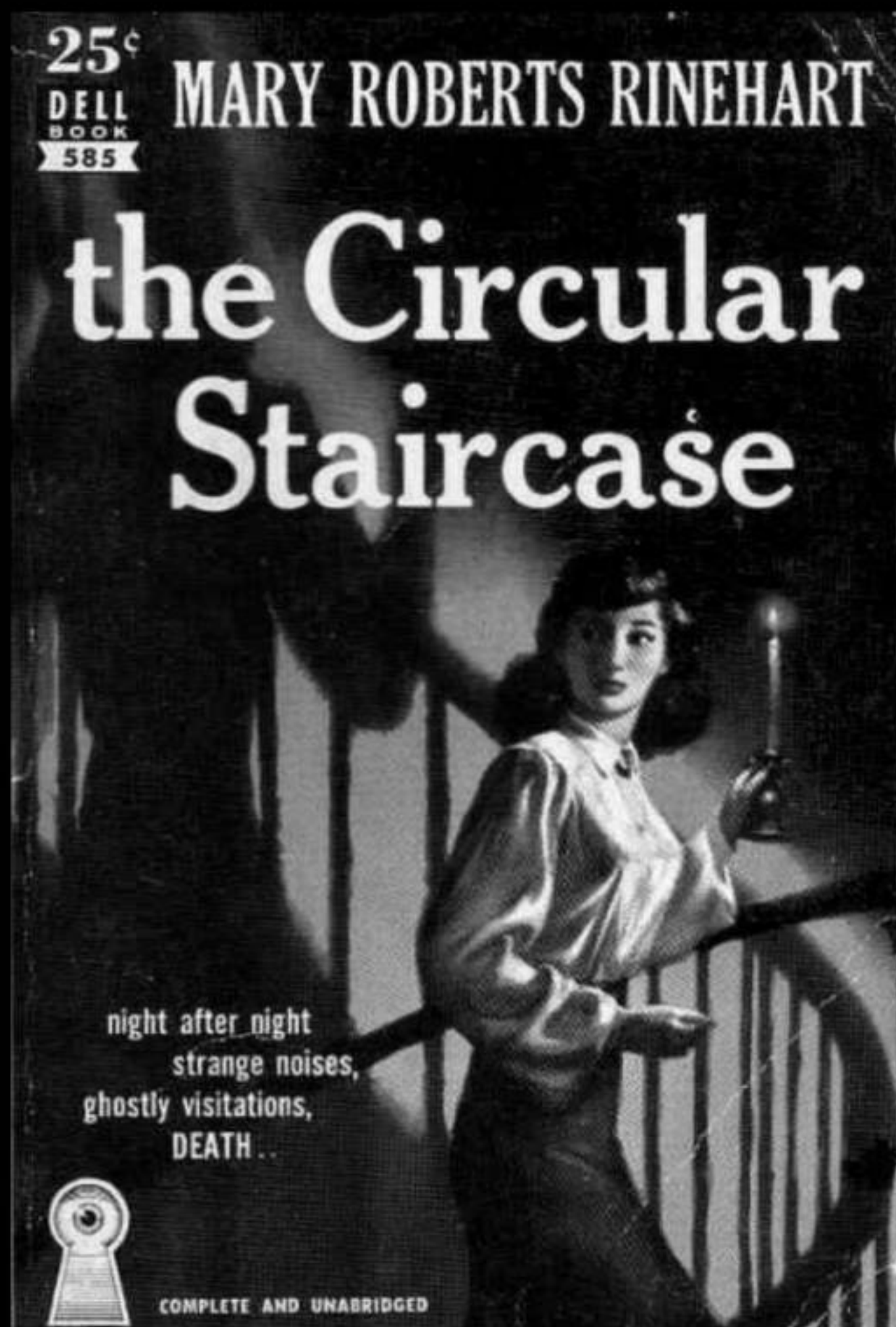
The Bat Whispers was released in November of 1930. It failed to acquire much critical praise with *The New York Times* which claimed that the film was “stale” and “moderately effective.” *Time Magazine* was in agreement and had little better to say about the picture. Box office returns were far from encouraging and before long *The Bat Whispers* vanished from theaters.

Thus far, this may seem like a far cry from a “great film,” but as history has shown, many great achievements that stand ahead of their time are often shunned despite their innovations. Before we get into details about *The Bat Whispers*, it’s crucial that we explore the film’s origins.

Like many motion pictures of the time period, *The Bat Whispers* stemmed from the literary world. Mary Roberts Rinehart’s mystery novel *The Circular Staircase*, published in 1908, is widely accepted as being the progenitor of the ‘old dark house’ genre. Typically, books or films in this storied sub-genre would contain the classic secluded house or mansion where a murder has taken place on a dark and stormy night. A handful of suspects, still in the house, would try to uncover the killer’s identity (the option of leaving said house was usually moot, since a terrible rain storm always seemed to wash out the nearest road or bridge). From here on elements of the story will differ, but it’s not uncommon for suspects to be killed (thereby narrowing down the ‘playing field’), for accusations to be tossed at the hired help (“the butler did it!”), and the inclusion of secret passageways (portraits with moving eyes and hollow bookcases). Sometimes a reading of the will would be the centerpiece for the murder, other times it would be hidden treasure or stolen money stashed somewhere in the house.

Rinehart’s *The Circular Staircase* became such a sensation that she wrote a stage adaptation of it with writer Avery Hopwood. The three-act play dropped the novel’s

name in favor of *The Bat*.



The Circular Staircase. Rinehart's novel is often credited with originating the old dark house genre.

The plot centered around a notorious super-criminal (the Bat) who commits a brilliant heist before arriving at an isolated country mansion where he begins to terrorize the hapless occupants. Opening on Broadway at the Morosco Theatre, *The Bat* played a total of 867 performances between August 23rd, 1920 and September 1922. Even though *The Bat* was based on Rinehart’s novel, *The Circular Staircase*, the play version was given its very own novelization in 1926. It would turn out to be a very special year for Rinehart’s master criminal, in more ways than one. The Bat’s murderous exploits would soon be seen by a new audience.



Mary Roberts Rinehart

BEWARE THE BAT!

By the mid-'20s the motion picture business had supplied a new venue for visual arts and *The Bat* was translated from stage and thrust onto the silver screen, albeit silently. It proved to be one of the first old dark house thrillers to make it into theaters. The film blended horror with comedy and proved to be a success with audiences. *The Bat* was directed by Roland West, who had previously wrapped-up *The Monster* (1926), an atmospheric mystery about a wannabe detective who investigates a mysterious disappearance at an insane asylum. The film is most notable for featuring Lon Chaney in the role of a mad scientist.

West gave *The Bat* a stylistic touch that has not diminished with age. After so many years, the film still holds a sense of visual awe – the shadows, massive set designs, slanted camera angles, and miniatures are a treat for silent film fans. Moreover, the Bat himself looks creepy and menacing when prowling around with his masked bat-like visage and pointed ears. As with many early motion pictures, little was done to preserve *The Bat* and for a number of years it was considered to be a lost film. Fortunately, a print was discovered in 1987.



Following *The Bat*'s release in 1926, the old dark house genre exploded and an outpouring of mystery thrillers flooded theaters. One of the most popular of the silent era was Paul Leni's *The Cat and the Canary* (1927). By 1930 the advent of sound continued this trend with the now-lost film *The Gorilla* starring Walter Pidgeon. (*The Gorilla* was later remade less than a decade later starring Bela Lugosi and the Ritz Brothers.) *The Cat Creeps*, featured a similar 'killer in spooky mansion' plot, though this early talkie has also been lost. A few clips have survived, however, and can be viewed in the 1932 short film, *Boo* (four of the film's original sound discs have also survived). Worth mentioning is that *The Cat Creeps* was the final film directed by Rupert Julian, the director of the 1925 *Phantom of the Opera*, starring Lon Chaney.

Despite the old dark house genre becoming a dime-a-dozen by 1930, the films were still in demand and the arrival of sound had beckoned to a familiar villain. Soon, the caped-fiend known as the Bat would be able to speak

– not in a shout but in a whisper...

FROM SILENCE TO A WHISPER

If moviegoers think that the remake craze is out of hand today, one is urged to take a brief look at a list of films made between 1925 and 1940. What seemed like a mad scramble to recreate the success of silent era films hit an all time high during the period of early sound pictures. Many of these films were remade only years apart as well! Take for example 1925's *The Unholy Three*, a film that received a re-imagining of its own only five years later (both starring Lon Chaney). The notorious lost silent, *London After Midnight* (1927) was remade in 1935 as *Mark of the Vampire* with Bela Lugosi, and a remake of *The Canary and the Canary* (1927) was released in 1939. In truth, this barely even touches the surface of the craze that swept Hollywood.

The Bat had performed well enough to warrant a sound remake and by 1930 Roland West was on set directing *The Bat Whispers*. This proved to be one in only a handful of instances where the director of the silent original would return for the 'talkie' version.

The Bat Whispers follows the plotline of the original closely, aside from reordering the continuity of a few scenes and changing the identity of the murderous Bat, so to keep audience members guessing...in case they remembered the outcome of the silent original four years earlier.

To go into a detailed plot of the film would only be to deprive viewers from the film's mystery, thrills, and laughs. With that said, even if the identity of the killer were to be revealed, *The Bat Whispers* is still a fun romp – one that never takes itself too seriously. For example, in a somewhat fanciful ending the audience is warned not to reveal the identity of the Bat, lest the murderous scoundrel go on a 'killing spree', so for the purpose of this writing that warning will be heeded.

The film's general premise hardly deviates from the old dark house methods previously discussed, which are rather cookie cutter in their own unique way. Unlike



some of the other movies in the genre, *Whispers* manages to find a good medium between the creepy and the comical.

Earlier, a bold statement was made in regard to *The Bat Whispers* being a ground-breaking, revolutionary film. It was even compared to, what some consider, the pinnacle achievement of the cinematic arts: *Citizen Kane*. These statements will be validated, for *The Bat Whispers* is a masterpiece, not just within the old dark house genre or among early sound films. It is a creative milestone in filmmaking, period. More bold claims, and now they will be backed up.

To begin with, it's worth noting that *The Bat Whispers*' plot, story, and dialogue are nothing if not typical of the genre and in no way, shape or form throw a curveball to the formula. It's said that West himself, while directing the film, would often ignore the actors' performances when the cameras rolled so that he could begin considering and setting the next shot. It's obvious that this was not due to laziness or a general lack of care. On the contrary, West's chief concern was pure technicality and, in that regard, he was a technical mastermind – such is where *The Bat Whispers* shines.

While *The Bat* used many of the same filmmaking methods that *Whispers* would later utilize, the 1930 effort featured more streamlined production values and cinematic advancements that wouldn't be used again for many decades. To say that West was a director ahead of his time would be a gross understatement.

The sound re-envisioning of *The Bat* gave moviegoers in 1930 more than just shrieks, creaking doors, and booming thunderclaps. West offered a new way of experiencing the film via Magnifilm – a 65mm widescreen process that was still very much in its experimental phase. At the time, films were shot solely on the 35mm format and were 'squared-off' when compared to the rectangular, panoramic image that widescreen offers. Today these two are more commonly referred to as pan-and-scan (or 'fullscreen') and widescreen.



Much time was spent testing this new widescreen process which resulted in the construction of an entirely new film camera capable of capturing a larger expanse while creating a sharper, more defined picture. In the press release for *The Bat Whispers*, West defended his new 65mm process by stating, "Wide-film shown on giant screens is the answer to a public demand for progress in motion picture entertainment. Larger theaters are being built, requiring larger screens. We have reached the last magnitude of the old 35mm film. If theaters enlarge the narrow film, it loses its sharpness. The new 65mm film on



the huge screen gives full detail. It also enhances the stereoscopic effect so that there is no distortion of the players to patrons sitting on the extreme sides of the theater."

Prior to 1930 only a select few films had attempted the widescreen non-anamorphic process to mixed results (a procedure that was dubbed 'Grandeur'). Some of these pictures experimented with 56mm and 70mm film, though the methods employed by West with *The Bat Whispers* achieved the basic foundation of the widescreen that the industry still uses today.

The Magnifilm process was exclusive to *The Bat Whispers*; it would be the first and only time the format was utilized in that exact capacity. Even so, it was far from forgotten and would later evolve into Cinemascope in 1953 and stand as the precursor to VistaVision in 1954. Further, West's Magnifilm provided the layout for Todd-AO, a high-resolution widescreen format used in *Cleopatra* (1963), *The Sound of Music* (1965), and *Patton* (1970).

Ultimately, two versions of *The Bat Whispers* had been filmed – one in 65mm and another in standard 35mm to accommodate theaters without the capacity to play the new format. One of the downsides to the 65mm process was that, while filming, it required extra lighting to properly illuminate the actors and sets. To combat this, new lighting equipment was constructed; unfortunately, the lights were so bright and discharged such heat that it added undue strain on the actors (some claimed that they lost weight while filming). Moreover, the film's star, Chester Morris is seen squinting and grimacing throughout the film. To the average viewer, this appears to be Morris simply indulging in his role when, in reality, he was wincing from the powerful lights. The lighting was so strong that it damaged Morris's retinas and he went on to suffer an eye inflammation known as Klieg eye.

Despite all the effort to ensure that Magnifilm would succeed the 35mm standard (United Artists, who produced *The Bat Whispers*, even built a 38 foot screen specifically made to project 65mm film) it proved to be an innovation too advanced for the period.

To West's misfortune, theater owners were vehemently opposed to the widescreen format and fought against it tooth and nail. Many theaters had just spent vast amounts of money to make the conversion to sound and, amidst the economic turmoil of the Great Depression, building larger screens and adopting projectors capable of properly playing 65mm film seemed out of the question. Citing the expense of installing the new equipment, most theaters refused the 65mm print of *The Bat Whispers*, making it something of a rarely seen oddity at the time. (The marketing campaign played heavily on the Magnifilm technology.) The final nail in the coffin came when the Hays Office banned the use of any widescreen format for at least two years, claiming that such inventions and gadgets should 'be postponed from arousing the public's curiosity.'



**Left: 35mm version of *The Bat Whispers*.
Right: 65mm shot by means of Magnifilm.**

Even critics of the time were unable to cope with the new look of widescreen. *Time Magazine* reported in their review of the film that actors appeared to be lost on the sets, due to the vast expanse around them. It's easy to why the widescreen print of *The Bat Whispers* was left unpreserved and went missing for close to fifty years until it resurfaced in the late 1980s.

Make no mistake – the technical marvels of *The Bat Whispers* are not just relegated to the innovations of Magnifilm. The opening scene of the film gives a fitting indication of the cinematic feats West had accomplished.

After the opening credits roll (silently, save for tolling bells) the shot fades onto a leveled angle at the face of a clock tower. The camera pulls back in a slow and fluid motion; resting behind the Gothic tower is a panoramic night-time display of other, shorter buildings and structures. Suddenly, without warning, the camera pans downwards and rapidly *descends* to the street, which we soon see is occupied by pedestrians and cars. Nearly

colliding into the street the shot tilts back up, bringing us to ground-level and allowing view of a building's entrance.

The next scene provides us with an interior front view seat of a police car, speeding through the city streets in a remarkable example of back-projection that the city-driving scenes in Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960) proved unable to duplicate thirty years after.

From there, the squad car arrives at the front of an apartment building where the camera pans up for a dazzling tracking shot that takes us up to a lit window. We then enter *through* the window, bringing us into the study of Mr. Bell, who is reading a warning note from the Bat. This entire opening sequence is technical artistry at its finest, and to consider the limitations of the time period it is all the more impressive.

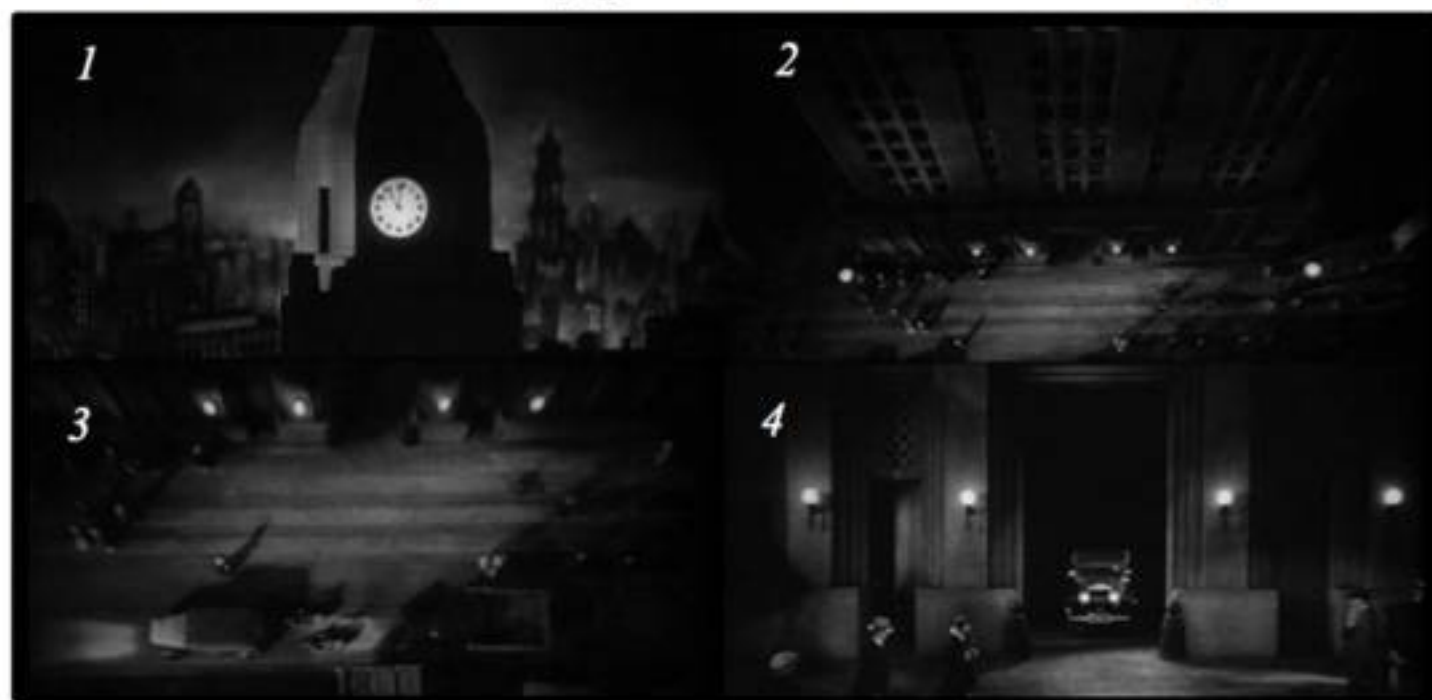
Of course, many of these shots were not achieved by physically moving a camera set-up from the top of a clock tower to the street. Instead, West had detailed miniatures constructed which could be blended and, through clever editing, meshed with shots of the actual locations when need be. The cinematography was not only daring in its execution, but the ambition and imagination fueling the camera maneuvers endowed *The Bat Whispers* with an equal combination of German expressionism and stylish Avant-Garde sensibility.

The miniatures gave West's film unprecedented movement, allowing him to sweep through the city at a whim and dart down large expanses in moments. These shots originated a style that took years for the film world to master by use of massive cranes, mounting cameras on helicopters and, only recently, enhancing complex camera movement with the addition of CGI.

Another early scene aided by the utilization of miniatures is a side-scroll across the city (a metropolis looking like a forerunner to Batman's very own Gotham City) while a train rolls by. This is followed by a fascinating shot of the train's point-of-view which culminates with a cross-dissolve as the camera tears down the street towards a bank (eagle-eyed viewers will catch the Bat's shadow reaching across the building).

The camera then pushes forward through a window to watch the bank vault being looted by an unknown person while the Bat's shadow looms to the side, watching the crime take place. Outside, as the bank robber gets into his car, yet another example of brilliant shadow-photography is displayed – this time a silhouette of the Bat's winged figure rises into frame. It would be hard to give more impressive examples of stylized cinematography.

The next scene has the Bat climbing down a rope to his car and giving chase to the



bank robber in a scene that would make James Bond jealous, as the criminal pulls a



lever to discharge a smokescreen from his exhaust, allowing him to elude the Bat.

Later on we are treated to a shot that starts out a far distance from the mansion as lightning casts a flickering glow upon the structure, only to have the camera sweep forward across the garden, through one of the mansion's windows, and down a long, narrow corridor.



This is duplicated to a degree later when Chester Morris's character, Detective Anderson, rushes outside the mansion and takes off through the garden as the camera follows after him.

In 1930 the standard Hollywood film camera was incapable of capturing West's cinematic vision – cameras of that era were bulky, heavy, and not well-suited for much (if any) serious movement. To counter this obtrusive roadblock, West had a brand new camera set-up devised, including an enhanced viewfinder and a dolly-mounted camera crane capable of zooming the camera twenty feet from Point A to Point B in mere seconds. A 300 foot track was designed to hold the camera on steel cables that could transport it fluidly down long stretches of distance without any jitters or unwanted clunkiness. According to publicity material of the film, West asserted that cameras were placed on wheels, cables, rails, trucks, specially made 'elevator rigs' and catapults, among many other contraptions.

The set design itself is something to behold.

Around 110 set pieces were constructed, each large and imposing enough to dwarf the actors. The desired effect was to create a sense of isolation in the mansion and West's efforts attained impeccable results. This is enhanced further by viewing a copy of the widescreen 65mm print, which captures the scope of the sets far more than the 35mm version. The lighting also had much to do with the look and feel of the backgrounds with their darkened crevices and ample use of shadows (not all the shadows were achieved through means of lighting, many were actually painted onto the sets).



West's elaborate set design as seen in 65mm Magnifilm.

Stylization: A raised camera angle and moody lighting.



Creepy portraits: A staple in old dark house films.

The look of the Bat was changed from the 1926 original.



Notice the use of lighting & shadow on Chester Morris's face.

West made ample use of candle light and lightning flashes for atmosphere.



The Bat Whispers invoked a sense of style many films were lacking back in the '30s. It seems by all accounts that West was a man out of his time, better fitted for a modern age than with his early film contemporaries. Today, directors like Tim Burton, Terry Gilliam, and the Wachowski Brothers have built their careers on individual styles, each noticeably distinct from the average film. Innovations such as widescreen are no longer viewed as special and technical advancements in the filmmaking medium are no longer shunned by theater owners, but welcomed with open arms – just look at how theaters are now always upgrading to larger screens, equipping digital projection, installing 7.1 surround sound, and endorsing 3D films.

Sadly, most film critics will never view *The Bat Whispers* as a breakthrough in cinema, they didn't back in 1930 and it's improbable that their views will change over eighty years later. West may have created camera movements that were never seen before, added a complexity to the angles that effectively throw the viewer off balance and transformed what could have been a standard 'by-the-numbers thriller' into a visual feast for the eyes, but he will never be compared to Orson Welles. His sets, built to grand scale, will never be discussed in film journals as "spectacular" or "masterful." West's lighting techniques, reliant on new technology, his brilliant use of candle light and lightning flashes which added a hypnotic, mesmerizing vibe have all but been forgotten. His application of miniatures (a special effect device used for countless films, including mega-hit blockbusters like *Star Wars*) will not be remembered to most. *Whispers'* influence can be felt in films today but credit will not go to West. Aside from a brief one sentence mention of *The Bat Whispers* in a collector's magazine for *Batman Returns* published in 1992, what is the legacy that West has so richly deserved as a filmmaker? Even the influence that *The Bat Whispers* is said to have had on the creation of Batman is little more than a footnote.

Today many still point out that *The Bat Whispers* suffers from 'stagey' acting and offers nothing new to the 'tired' old dark house subgenre. In reality, any qualms about so-called 'stagey' acting should easily be forgiven if such transferred over, being that many actors of the time period originated from the stage. *Dracula* (1931) is an example of this as well, but continues to be held in high regard. In further defense of the performances, 'overacting', as some might call it, is still seen in film today – but now it's more accepted in roles (just look at Gary Oldman's performance in 1994's *Léon: The Professional*). As for the claim that *Whispers* is a "stale" entry in the genre, it's worth noting that James Whale's *The Old Dark House*, released two years after West's picture, continues to earn critical praise despite lacking the abundance of visual flair, nor deviating from the trappings of the subgenre.

The real criminal in this story is not the villainous Bat, but the Library of Congress, who has yet to deem *The Bat Whispers* as a "culturally, historically, or aesthetically significant" film. So where can we leave *The Bat Whispers*? Critics dismiss it, film historians/universities ignore it, and the public has forgotten about it. When the Marx Brothers' 1933 comedy *Duck Soup* first came out it

was a box office flop and critically panned, but now it sits on AFI's current list of *100 Years, 100 Movies*. Though that shouldn't be reason for any hope, after all, this is the same list that once featured *Frankenstein* (1931) in the top *100 Movies* but has since removed it to make room for *The Sixth Sense* (1999). Disgraceful.

SHADOWS OF THE BAT

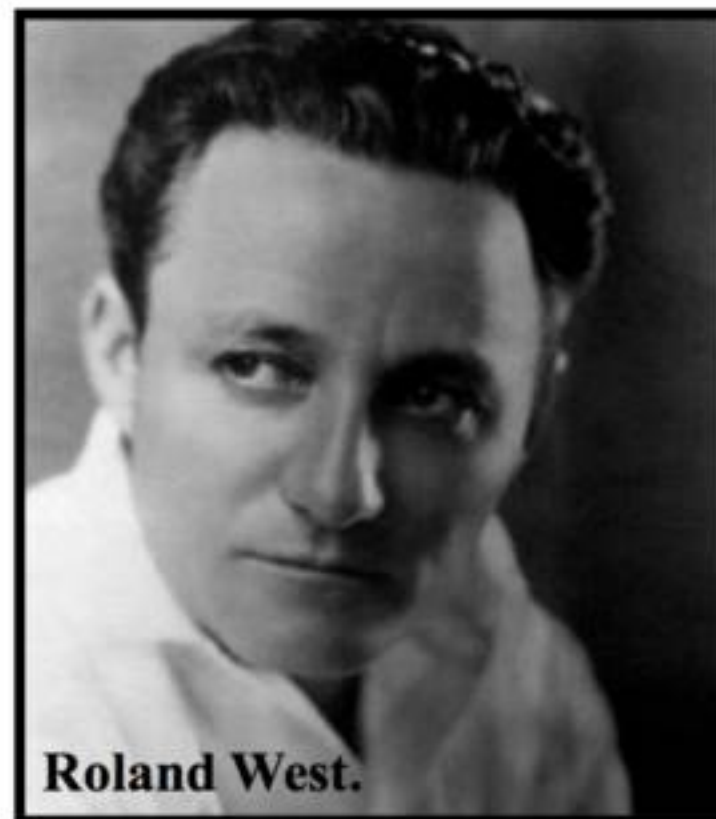
After *The Bat Whispers* had vacated theaters the title character hadn't truly vanished. In 1933 RCA Victor released Mary Roberts Rinehart's novel as one of the first "talking book" recordings, in effect making it a very early examples of the still popular audio-book format.

Readers of *Detective Comics* #27 in 1939 would find a startling new character within those pages: The Batman. As alluded to earlier, there have been claims that *The Bat Whispers* and its silent precursor were some of the many inspirations towards the character's creation.

By 1953 a stage revival of *The Bat* played on Broadway's National Theatre. It lasted for a total of 23 performances from January 20th to February 7th of 1953.

In 1959 Crane Wilbur directed yet another remake of *The Bat*, this time starring Vincent Price and Agnes Moorehead.

Last but not least, no discussion of *The Bat Whispers* would be complete without a little personal history on the film's director. Roland West was born on February 20th 1885 in Cleveland, Ohio as Roland Van Ziemer. By his early twenties he had firmly planted himself in vaudeville productions, immersing himself in acting, writing, and eventually directing. His entry



Roland West.

into the film business began in 1915 when he moved to New York City which, in turn, would lead him to Hollywood.

While filming West was said to hate nothing more than the intrusion of studio personnel or producers on his set. This led to a shooting schedule fit for a vampire, filming only

at night. Though having a number of semi-successful films under his belt, West only directed one more film after *The Bat Whispers* – *Corsair* (1931) a high-seas adventure that lacked much of his previous polish.

Following 1931 West's life takes a strange turn, not unlike something out of his two *Bat* pictures. Disenchanted with the motion picture industry and United Artists, along with being none too eager to sign a contract with a larger, more domineering studio, West retired from the film industry. Some claim that he considered returning to the business in the late '30s, but whether this was fact or fiction will never be known.

West's final film, *Corsair* is of significance because it co-starred Thelma Todd, an up-and-coming actress who had already been in quite a number of films (appearing in close to 120 pictures by the end of her career) and would appear in three Marx Brothers pictures in the early '30s. Her star seemed to be rising – and perhaps it would have continued to, if not for the tragic circumstances that were to follow a few short years later.



Thelma Todd

After the filming of *Corsair*, Todd became involved in a relationship with West. Not only did they live together but would go on to open Thelma Todd's Sidewalk Café: a nightclub/restaurant intended to cater to people in show business. It also happened to draw the attention of shady individuals with ties to the underworld. As rumor has it, those with connections to organized crime wanted to buy the restaurant and turn it into a gambling establishment to weed out money from the wealthy Hollywood elite. (Another rumor was that they intended to keep the restaurant façade but use it as an outlet to get the patrons drunk in order to blackmail them.) West and Todd refused to sell.

From here, facts become speculative and rumors take flight quicker than a swarm of bats on a moonlit night. What is known is that on December 16th, 1935 Todd was found dead in her car in her garage. Authorities suspected foul play but, due to not finding any evidence to the contrary, labeled her death as accidental carbon dioxide poisoning. Some have said that it was suicide, but this seemed to be the least likely scenario, as many of Todd's friends alleged that she never suffered from bouts of depression. One train of thought is that Todd was murdered by gangsters as a reprisal for not selling the restaurant and

Thelma Todd's Sidewalk Café



to scare West into closing the business. Some go as far as to say that the infamous gangster Charlie 'Lucky' Luciano had a hand in the murder. And finally, another theory is that West himself murdered her. It's been suspected that he may have killed her on his yacht before bringing her to the garage to make it look like a suicide. It was said that West and Todd had a somewhat volatile relationship and that he was not only controlling, but had a fierce temper. In support of evidence, one rumor purports that West, on his deathbed, confessed to *Whispers'* actor Chester Morris that he murdered Todd – but, as such, this cannot be verified. Whatever the case, West sold the restaurant soon after, married actress Lola Lane (the inspiration for Superman's Lois Lane) in 1940, and lived in total seclusion for the rest of his life. He died on March 31st, 1952 from heart failure.

As odd as it seems, the mysterious stigma surrounding West's later years didn't end with his death. In 1955 his former yacht, the *Joyita*, was found adrift in the South Pacific, all 25 passengers and crew were missing. When the ship was found – sans passengers – it was in poor condition and missing its navigational equipment, but still very much afloat. The vessel was built to be particularly buoyant, and thereby nearly unsinkable – making it all the more of a mystery why the passengers had vacated. To this day, it still remains an unsolved mystery as to what happened to the crew.

FINAL WHISPERS

For those who have yet to see *The Bat Whispers* it goes without saying that it is *highly* recommended. To those who have had the pleasure of

watching it, see it again. It's not just a good film or even a *great* film, it's a masterpiece – one might even say, "It's the *Citizen Kane* of old dark house movies."



BEYOND FANTASTIQUE!

[**bee-ond:** outside the understanding, limits, or reach of; past: beyond comprehension.]

[**fan-tas-teek:** a French term for a cinematic or literary genre encompassing horror, science fiction and fantasy.]

CINEMA:

DRACULA: SOVEREIGN OF THE DAMNED

Toei Animation/Harmony Gold; 1983, Running Time: 90 Min.,
Dir: Minoru Okazaki.



Will this animated bloodsucker have any bite?

This was a Japanese made for TV animation based on Marvel Comics' *Tomb of Dracula* series. The director of the piece is a little difficult to gather. According to the end credits it is Robert Barron. According to imdb.com there were two directors: Akinori Nagaoka and Minoru Okazaki. Finally, according to *vampyres online* it was Minoru Okazaki as Robert Barron. Okazaki was definitely involved therefore, taking a westernized pseudonym by the looks of things, but I am not sure how Nagaoka fits in.

Dracula has transplanted himself to Boston and we discover three distinct groups at work. There is Dracula himself, there is the Black Mass – a group of Satanists – and a group of vampire hunters.

As the feature begins the Black Mass are in a church, defiling it so they can perform their ceremonies. They intend to summon Satan and offer him one of their number, Delores, as his mortal bride. During the ritual a bat flies in and transforms into Dracula – who takes Delores away, snatching her from Satan. The Black Mass high priest assumes that the visitation was from Satan.

Dracula is going to turn Delores but cannot bite her as he feels love. He goes into the night and slakes his thirst on a couple of random women. It is interesting to note just how quickly his victims turn blue/gray in color.

We see the primary vampire hunters, the wheelchair bound Hans Harker and Rachel Van Helsing recruit Frank Drake, a mortal descendent of Dracula's line and martial arts expert. They are going to use the evil-sniffing dog Elijah to find Dracula.

Meanwhile the high priest of the Black Mass is confused



as to why Satan is ignoring them. Satan appears before him and reprimands him for letting Dracula steal his bride (later we find out that Dracula did this as revenge for being converted into a vampire by Satan himself). The high priest swears revenge but Satan tells him to wait one year.

One year on and the hunters have not found Dracula yet, though they have narrowed the search to an area of map shaped like a bat! Meanwhile

Dracula has married Delores and they have a son, Janus. Delores has recognized their love for each other and their son has allowed them to access a kernel of goodness within each other. Satan is now able to get his revenge and the son is killed.

Here on in we get the presence of heaven resurrecting Janus and converting him into a man so that he can kill his father. We also get a storyline of Satan stripping Dracula of his vampire status and Dracula searching for a way to be turned again. Other vampires are not so keen and one has to question why the mortal Dracula still has his hand steam when he holds a cross.

The animation is very dated now, but does the job well. The story is convoluted and a mixed bag, sometimes interesting and at others annoying. The vampire hunters seem fairly damn useless and the hopes that Blade would appear (he was introduced in *Tomb of Dracula*) is a vain one. The thought of Dracula, still a vampire, being domesticated was a little off-putting. Janus (the elder) looked like he walked straight out of a costumed superhero animation and was fairly pointless as a hunter – though he was more a nexus for storyline than anything.

All that said, the biggest sin was the voice acting. The English dub is awful, overly melodramatic and filled with all the worst excesses of dubbing for Japanese animation. This is still entertaining, however, and quite a rarity – you'll really have to search to find this one. 6 out of 10 is given as it is entertaining despite the off-putting dubbing.

--- Reviewed by Andrew M. Boylan

(First printed on the blog, *Taliesin Meets the Vampires*)

BOY WONDER

*Boy Wonder Films; 2010, Running Time: 93 Min.,
Dir: Michael Morrissey, Writer: Michael Morrissey; Cast: Caleb
Steinmeyer, Zulay Henao, Bill Sage.*

Beware the hero...

Recently the superhero film genre has been edging ever closer to down-and-dirty realism in favor of those once-vibrant, fanciful adventures born from the golden age of comics. Ironically, 2011 featured two superhero films that delved into the area of the more fantastical, *Thor* and *Green Lantern*, both of which failed to garner the same critical reviews and box office returns as Christopher Nolan's record-breaking Batman venture, *The Dark Knight* – a grim real-world approach to one of DC Comics' most cherished properties.

Within the last few years a string of films that featured 'not-so-super' heroes have been released. Among them were *Watchmen* (2009), *Defendor* (2009), *Kick-Ass* (2010), and *Super* (2010). Each featured characters taking justice into their own hands, despite lacking any real powers akin to radioactive bug-bites or x-ray vision. This trend continues, but to a far greater degree, with Michael Morrissey's *Boy Wonder*. Morrissey's effort firmly sits in a genre all by itself and any true comparisons to the aforementioned films would be a potential disservice to what the director has offered his audience.

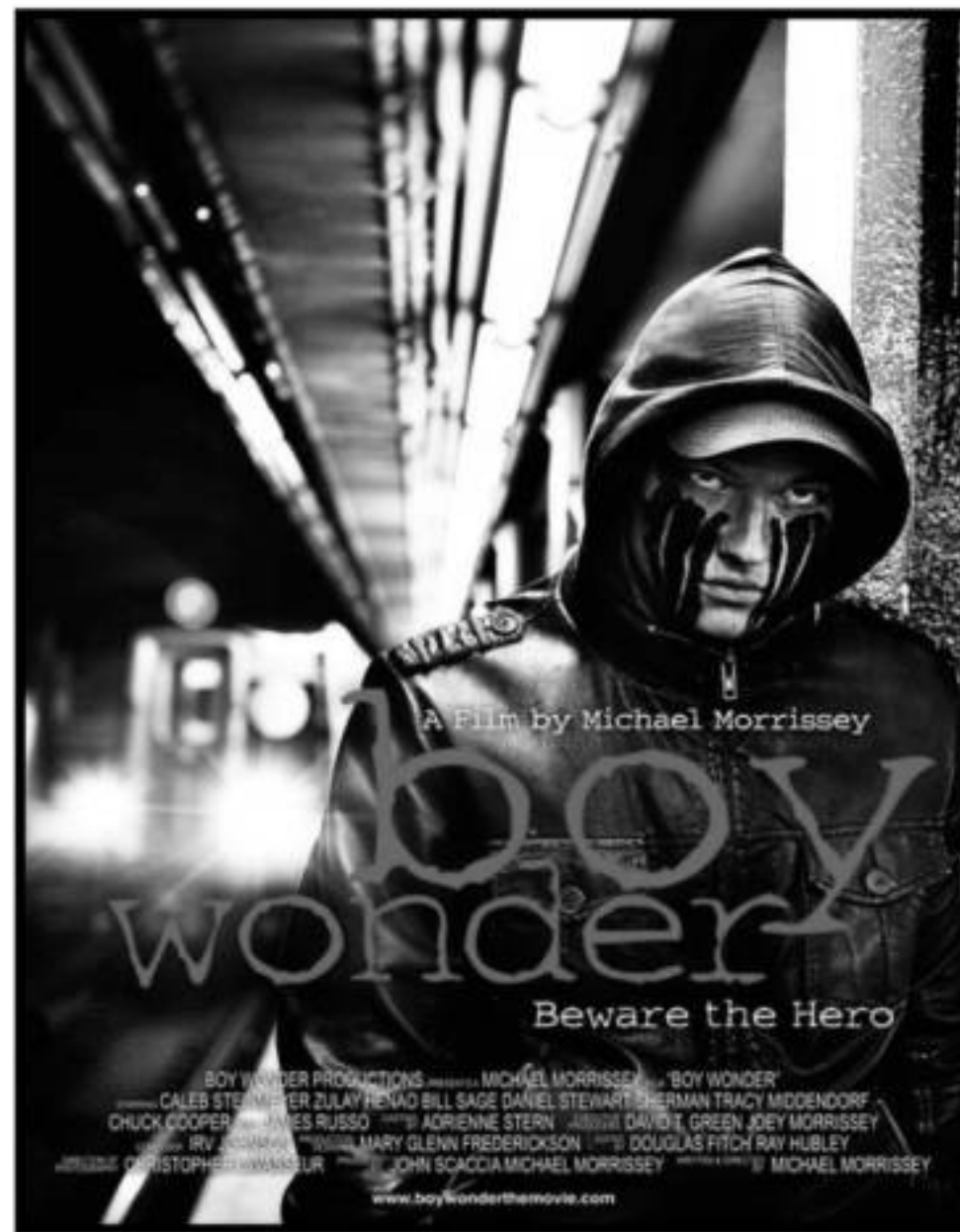
Boy Wonder tells the story of Sean Donovan, a young Brooklynite who witnesses the brutal murder of his mother during a car-jacking gone horribly wrong. Fast forward ten years and 17-year-old Sean is now an introverted, socially awkward straight-A student. Yet, behind this façade, Sean is still endlessly tormented by his mother's death and continuously searches for her murderer. Discarding his bookwormish Peter Parker appearance, Sean takes to the streets at night, doling out justice as he sees fit upon the seedy underbelly of New York City's worst inhabitants. Drug pushers, pimps, and subway-riding crazies soon find themselves locked in his avenging sights.

Despite the film's title (clearly a reference to Batman's young partner), there is no spandex costumes here. Sean doesn't partake in donning a colorful outfit, opting instead for a black hood and some occasional face make-up. There's not one instance in *Boy Wonder* that feels like it creeps into the ambit of fantasy. Even the fight scenes are brutal in their presentation; each physical altercation is kept short and entirely devoid of stylized combat. When a character gets a hook to the jaw, a beer bottle smashed over their head, or a metal pipe to the ribs it looks like it hurts. No one is shrugging off any blows here. Every bone-crushing strike is accounted for and the director effectively knows how to capture each agonizing moment.

Aside from its allegorical superhero theme, *Boy Wonder* invokes elements of the tried-and-true vigilante genre, much in the vein of *Death Wish* (1974), *Fighting Back* (1982), and *The Brave One* (2007). It would have been easy for *Boy Wonder* to tread familiar territory, complete with the conventional "I've seen it before" outcome, but it avoids the usual trappings, becoming an unpredictable psychological thrill-ride that will leave you breathless by the film's dramatic conclusion. The last half-hour, especially, throws in a series of curveballs that will keep you guessing. Not one second of the film's running time is wasted filler, even the final few moments of the film keeps the pace up.

The cinematography and editing deserve much praise here as well. *Boy Wonder* is a perfect example of how proper editing can seamlessly connect flashbacks with present action. Further, it was nice to see that the fight scenes weren't over-edited, leaving viewers able to actually see what was going on.

A proper review of this film wouldn't be worth its salt if the acting was left unmentioned. Caleb Steinmeyer, who plays Sean, may be a relatively unknown face now – but wow, can he act! At the beginning of the film Steinmeyer endows Sean with



regard, though everyone performs their roles well. The dialogue is as believable as the physical action; there's no forced lines or exaggerated ham-jobs here.

At its core, *Boy Wonder* is a psychological study of a character's ambition to do what's right, but in that pursuit, becomes a nocturnal avenger who is on the verge of imploding. As the film gathers an even greater following (and it will), debate may be inevitable among fan circles as to whether this is truly a 'superhero' or 'vigilante' film – or simply a hybrid of the two. There's no denying that the vigilante elements are there, but the traditional cinematic vigilante rarely ever goes looking for trouble or enlists in a nightly crusade to 'clean up the streets'. Rather, the celluloid vigilante is set on fixing a single problem, one that personally opposes them or has wronged them (i.e. a crime boss that has murdered their family, etc.) Typically, their mission is over once they have found a semblance of personal justice.

In my opinion however, I would argue that *Boy Wonder* is largely a superhero movie over the more standard vigilante fare, albeit a very dark superhero tale. In archetypal superhero mythology, a heroic character doesn't just set out to satisfy their own interests or avenge their own loved ones to find inner peace. Certainly, Spider-Man goes after his Uncle Ben's murderer first, as, initially, The Punisher goes after those who murdered his family; even Batman in some iterations goes after his parents' murderer, Joe Chill, once he dons his iconic costume. Yet, each hero also goes out into the world to aid a broken system, aside from just the pacification of individual triumph. Sean wants his mother's killer dead, but doesn't solely focus on that target; his crusade is one propelled by personal justice to right the wrongs of all society. That is the work of a hero, even if it's a hero that possesses both Batman's sociopathic obsession to avenge his loved ones and the ever-raging internal pathos of *Taxi Driver's* Travis Bickle. The tagline of *Boy Wonder* is one of the most fitting ever devised: *Beware the Hero*. Sean, for all his desire to help people, is a loose canon, an individual that lacks restraint.

It's easy to see that *Boy Wonder's* director, Michael Morrissey, is a fan of comics, though the darker underbelly of the medium, to be sure. While the term 'superhero' is never uttered during the film and not a single comic book reference is made verbally or visually (aside from the title), Morrissey gives us a realistic tale of a young man who represents everything a real-life superhero could and, perhaps, would be: brave, tragic, flawed, and utterly human.

--- Reviewed by Chris Nelson

After the sun has set
and the night wind has died
comes the hour of
The Bat People!



A Lulu Shaw Production
"The Bat People" starring Stewart Moss - Marianne McAndrew
Screenplay by Michael Piller - "Bat People" Music by Aris Kani - "COLON by DeLuxe"
Written and Produced by Lulu Shaw - Directed by Jerry Johnson - An American International Release

THE BAT PEOPLE (1974)

AKA

IT LIVES BY NIGHT

One of the strangest of *any* Bat-themed horror films, *The Bat People* tells the story of a doctor who, while vacationing in New Mexico, is bitten by a diseased bat. If you thought rabies was scary, it's nothing compared to what's in store for the good doctor. Not long after receiving the bite, the doc begins to turn into a hideous half-man half-bat creature. Monstrous transformations, a killing spree, and swarms of attacking bats ensue.

Though the pacing of the film is on the slow side, fans of B-grade '70s horror films will find much to appreciate here and the man-bat make-up is done by none other than Stan Winston! Recommended for a fun time, but don't expect any deep subtext coming out of this one.

---Reviewed by Mark Roberts



A Lulu Shaw Production
"It Lives by Night" starring Stewart Moss - Marianne McAndrew
Screenplay by Michael Piller - "Bat People" Music by Aris Kani - "COLON by DeLuxe"
Written and Produced by Lulu Shaw - Directed by Jerry Johnson - An American International Release

VIDEO GAMES

BATMAN ARKHAM CITY

Warner Bros. Interactive/Eidos Interactive; 2011, Rocksteady Studios; Platforms: Playstation 3, Xbox 360, PC

The darkest side of the Knight

Batman: Arkham City doesn't feature the same Batman you may remember from when you were a kid. This game has a dark, twisted and perplexing storyline that you could only find in the comic book series and perhaps a few scenes of the newer Batman films. The villains here feel like real sinister geniuses that are worthy of being Batman's foes rather than the ridiculous guys dressed up in outlandish clothes that we are accustomed to. *Batman: Arkham City* is full of action packed goodness, and it will keep you on the edge of your seat the entire game.

The story of *Batman: Arkham City* begins with Bruce Wayne being abducted and taken to the Arkham City prison. Arkham City is a blocked off section of Gotham that is home to every criminal in the nearby area including Batman's biggest nemeses such as The Penguin, Mr. Freeze and The Joker. Bruce soon escapes from the prison within Arkham City and gets his trusty butler Alfred to fly in his gear and bat suit. Batman decides to further investigate the meaning of Protocol 10 that Dr. Hugo Strange mentioned during his imprisonment, a decision that will lead Batman through a series of events that will challenge his detective's skills and perhaps even lead to his demise.

The premise of *Batman: Arkham City* will sound somewhat similar to its predecessor, but there have been some major changes made since *Batman: Arkham Asylum*. The most noticeable difference is that *Batman: Arkham City* is a huge, open-world game with plenty of amusing activities such as climbing and grappling buildings and beating up random bad guys on the streets. You'll gain experience points and level up

when you defeat enemies, and you can then purchase new skills and upgrades that will be beneficial during combat.

The combat system in the game has been upgraded to include the use of Batman's gadgets. Gadgets are even more important outside of combat, because Batman must use them to solve puzzles to progress through missions and eventually complete the game. Gadgets are also useful for solving the hundreds of Riddler puzzles scattered throughout the game. These puzzles will be annoying for completionists, but they do add more playing time to an already great game.

In addition to Riddler puzzles, there are a load of other side quests for you to complete, and some of them even lead to

some really epic boss fights with notorious Batman villains. However, some of the game's side missions are really difficult to complete, but luckily, they are optional. If you download the special Catwoman downloadable content pack, you'll also complete a ton of new missions as the notorious thief that will literally change the beginning of the game. *Batman: Arkham City* also features a challenge mode outside of campaign called Riddler's Revenge that will ask you to complete certain tasks using different characters. Your results can be uploaded to online leaderboards so you can see how your combat and detective skills compare with players around the world.

Batman: Arkham City is easily the best Batman game of all-time, and it is one of the best games to be released this year. It is a visual masterpiece to look at, and it features an impressive soundtrack to boot. Combat is fun and strategic at the same time, and the game's puzzles also keep you on your toes. Some of the side missions can get annoying, but you'll never run out of things to do, and the campaign's main story is amazing from

start to finish. If you enjoyed *Batman: Arkham Asylum*, you'll have even more fun with *Batman: Arkham City*. If you didn't care for the original or never tried it, you should give this game a try. You may be surprised with how much you enjoy it; I know I was.

--- Reviewed by Amanda Dyar



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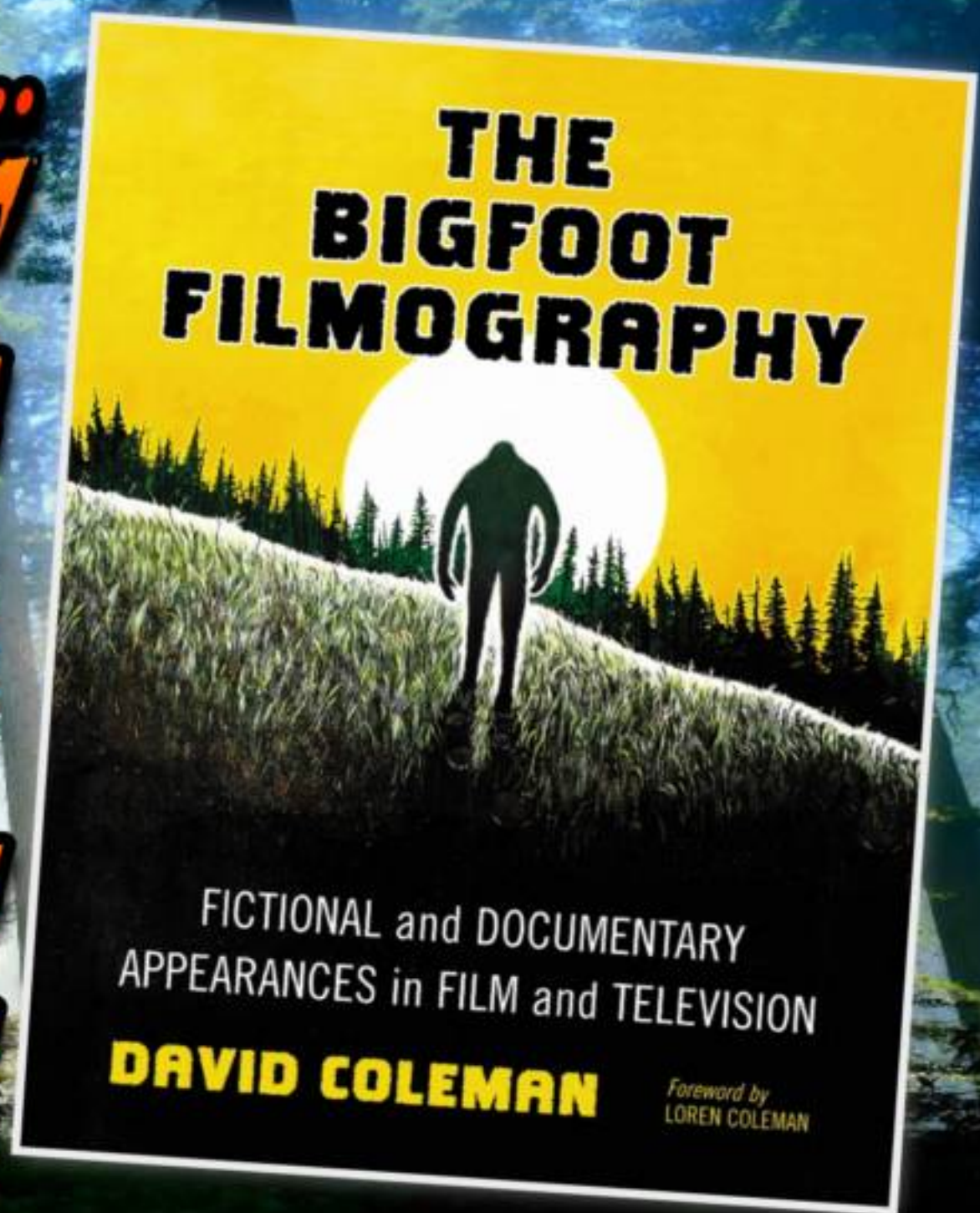
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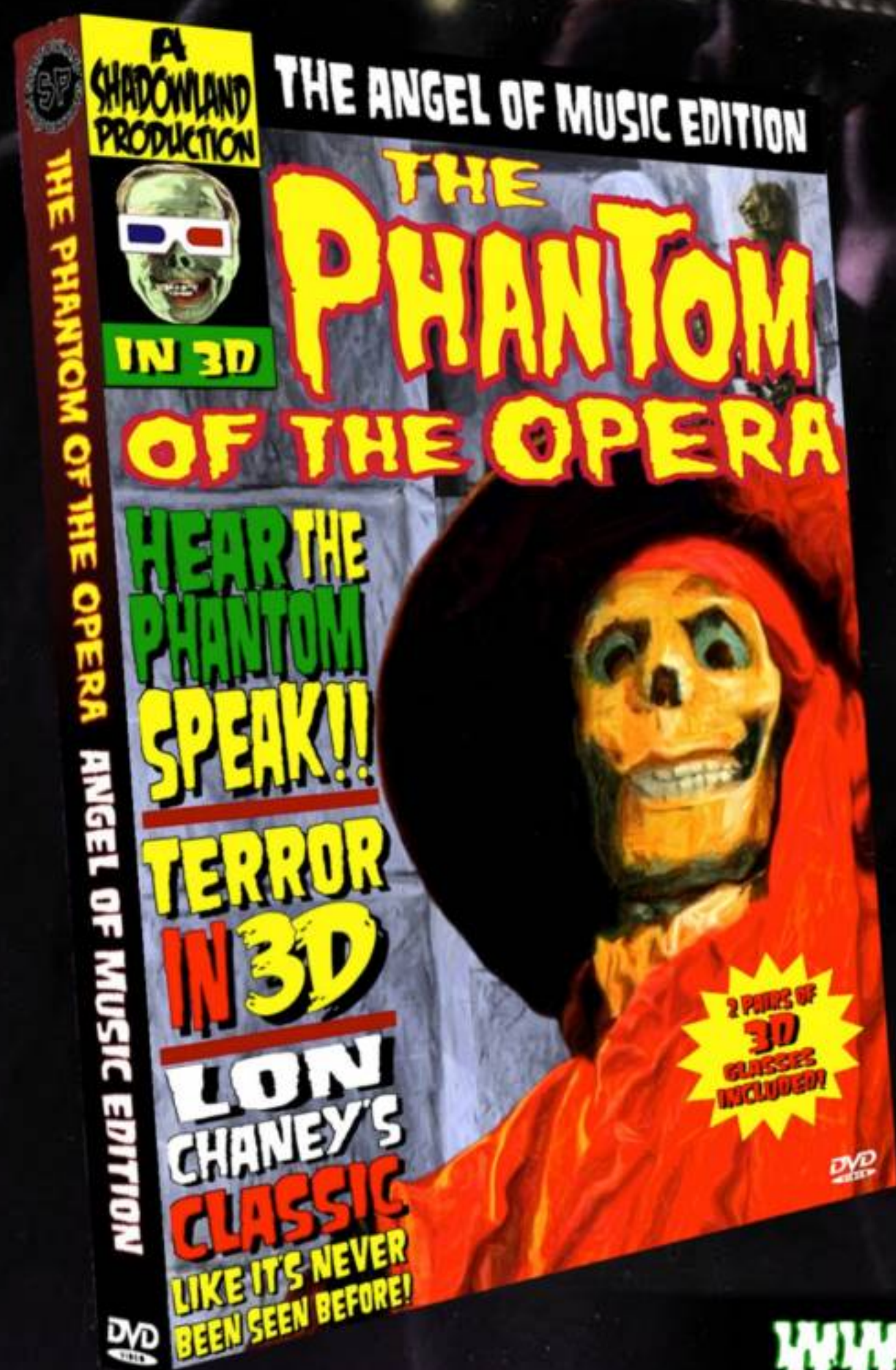
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BATMAN

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